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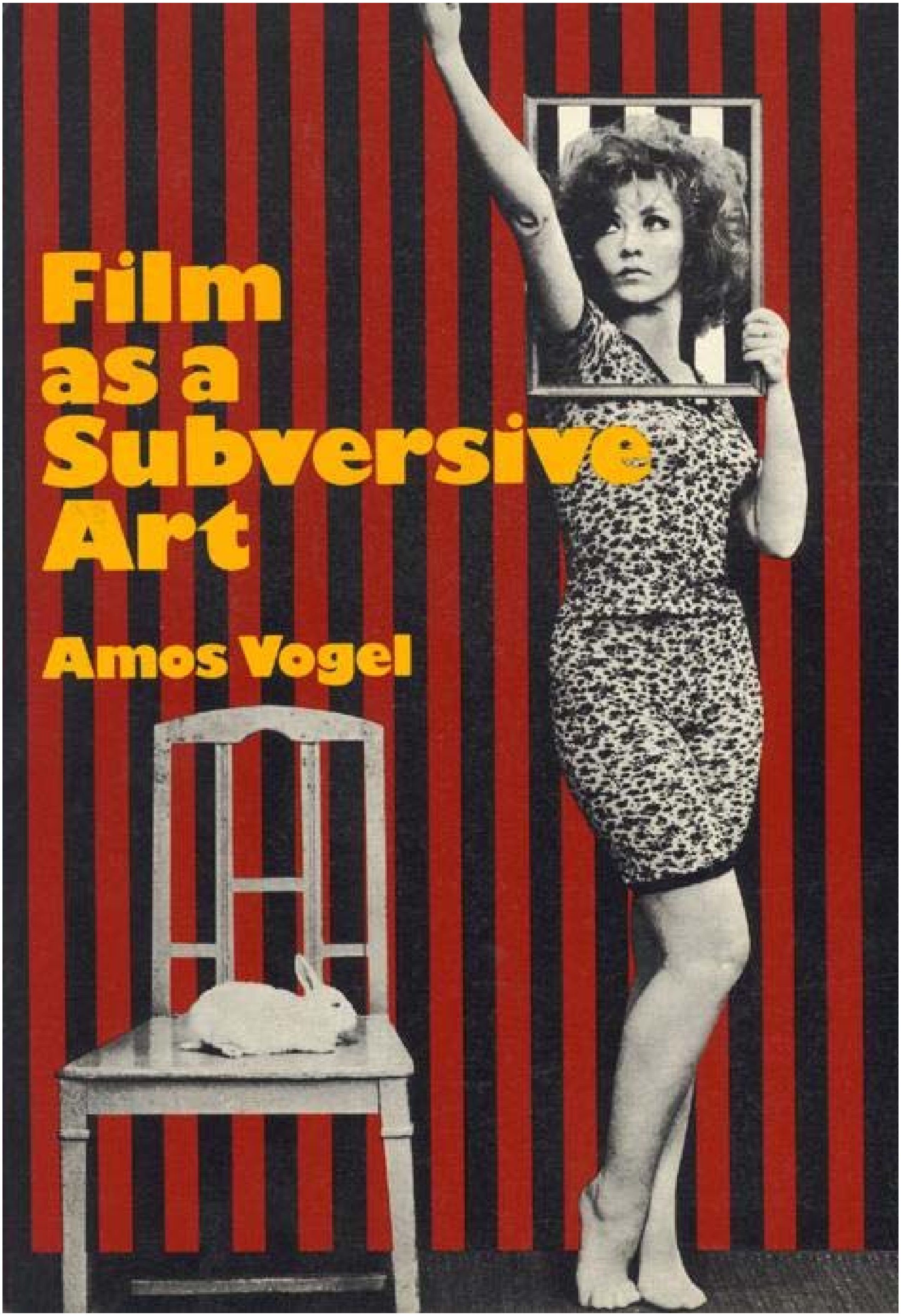
Film as a Subversive Art

Amos Vogel



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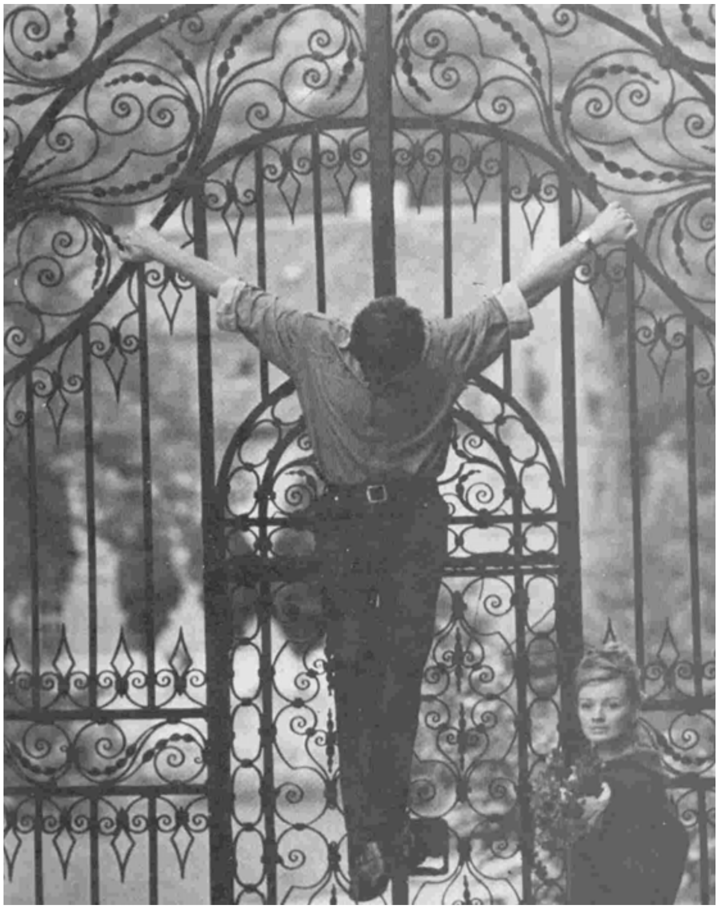

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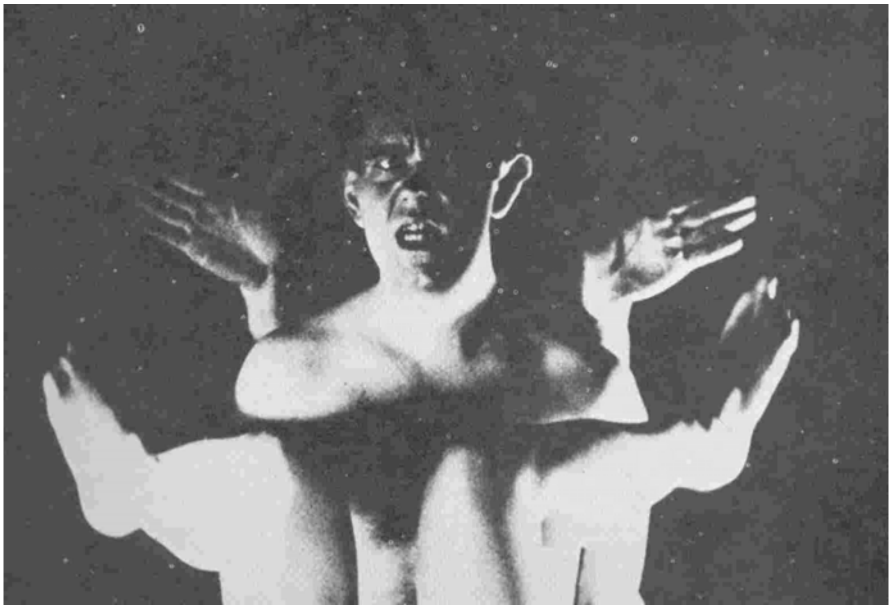

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FILM
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INTRODUCTION

THE FILM EXPERIENCE

This is a book about the subversion of existing values, institutions, *mores*, and taboos -- East and West, Left and Right -- by the potentially most powerful art of the century. It is a book that traffics in scepticism towards all received wisdom (including its own), towards eternal truths, rules of art, "natural" and man-made laws, indeed whatever may be considered holy. It is an attempt to preserve for a fleeting moment in time -- the life of this book -- the works and achievements of the subversives of film.

Subversion in cinema starts when the theatre darkens and the screen lights up. For the cinema is a place of magic where psychological and environmental factors combine to create an openness to wonder and suggestion, and unlocking of the unconcious. It is a shrine at which modern rituals rooted in atavistic memories and subconscious desires are acted out in darkness and seclusion from the outer world.

The power of the image, our fear of it, the thrill that pulls us toward it, is real. Short of closing one's eyes -- in cinema, a difficult and unprecedented act -- there is no defense against it.

When Lumiere's immortal train first pulled into that station in 1895, moving directly towards the camera, the audience shrieked. it did so again when Bunuel sliced a woman's eyeball with a razor, when Clouzot quite literally made the dead return, when Hitchcock committed sudden murder in a shower, when Franju killed animals before its eyes. The audience fainted during films of operations, vomited during birth sequences, rose in spontaneous enthusiasm at propaganda films, wept while the heroine died protractedly from leukemia, shouted with delicious anxiety during Cinerama's rollercoaster ride, and even felt twinges of concern at being exposed to screen cholera. In the light of these manifest responses, why assume that the countless other fantasies dreamt in silence in the cinemas of the world during the last seventy years -- fantasies of lust, violence, ambition, perversion, crime, and romantic love -- were any less powerful?

"It is at the movies that the only absolutely modern mystery is celebrated", said Andre Breton. (1) It is appropriate that it was a surrealist who so well expressed the curious combination of technology and metaphysics that is cinema; for modern science's realization of a continuum from the rational to the irrational relates directly to the very nature of the film-viewing process. This entails a darkened theatre, greater openness to suggestion, the semi-hypnotic trance of the viewer, the surfacing of deeper desires and anxieties, and the inhibition of reasoned response in favor of "gut-level" reaction. Far from representing a defeat in man's struggle towards conciousness, the acceptance of this inevitable duality (the flowing into each other of rationalism and irrationality) is itself a step toward the future.

The mechanics of the film-viewing process have been discussed by Mauerhofer, Kracauer, Stephenson-Debrix and others, (2) though a comprehensive analysis remains to be undertaken. The viewer enters the theatre willingly, if not eagerly, ready for surrender, (and deeply dissatisfied if the film is "bad" and the illusion does not "work"). The film experience requires total darkness; the viewer must not be distracted from the bright rectangle from which huge shapes impinge on him. Unlike the low-pressure television experience (during which the viewer remains aware of room environment and other people, aided by appropriately named "breaks"), the film experience is total, isolating, hallucinatory. The viewer "forgets" where or who he is and is offended by stray light, street or audience noises which destroy the anticipated, accepted illusion.

As soon as the lights are lowered, the huge rectangle of the screen -- previously noted without interest -- becomes the viewer's total universe. What transpires here in bursts of light and darkness is accepted as life; the images reach out to him; he enters them.

The many mysteries of film begin at this moment; the acceptance of a flat surface as three-dimensional, of sudden action-, scale- or set-changes as ordinary, of a border delimiting this fraudulent universe as normal, of black- and-white as reality. The spectator, Rudolf Arnheim points out, (3) experiences no shock at finding a world in which depth perception has been altered, sizes and distances flattened and the sky is the same color as the human face.

But the mysteries are only beginning. The very darkness enveloping the viewer is more complete than he realizes; for the essence of cinema is not light, but a secret compact between light and darkness. Half of all the time at the movies is spent by the transfixed victims of this technological art in complete darkness. There is no image on the screen at all. In the course of a single second, forty-eight periods of darkness follow forty-eight periods of light.

During this same infinitesimal period, every image is shown to the audience twice; and as a still photograph; for the film comes to a dead stop in the projector forty-eight times in the course of a single second. Given the retina's inability to adjust quickly to differences in brightness, an illusion of movement is created by this rapid, stop-start series projection of still photographs, each slightly different from the one before.

Thus, during half the time spent at the movies, the viewer sees no picture at all; and at no time is there any movement. Without the viewer's physiological and psychological complicity, the cinema could not exist.

The "illusion" of film -- so platitudinously invoked by journalists -- is thus revealed as a far more intricate web of deception, involving the very technology of the film process and the nature of its victim's perceptions. Could it be precisely during the periods of total darkness -- 45 out of every 90 minutes of film we see -- that our voracious subconcious, newly nourished by yet another provocative image, "absorbs" the work's deeper meaning and sets off chains of associations?

It is in this alien environment that the viewer willingly permits himself to be invaded by strong images, created and manipulated by a director-magician who entirely controls his vision. True, all vision, even undirected, is dynamic, and reflects, as Arnheim emphasizes, an invasion of the organism by external forces which upset the balance of the nervous system. (4) But while in daily life the viewer can shift his focus of attention as he wishes (without losing a sense of continuity regarding his surroundings), in cinema his attention is "riveted" on a pre-ordained succession of images, whose nature, tempo, sequence, and duration have been carefully constructed for maximum impact by a third party.

Removed from the real world, isolated even from fellow-viewers, the spectator falls to dream and reverie in the womb-like darkness of the theatre. Flooded by images, his unconcious is freed from customary constraints and his rational faculties are inhibited. Stephenson and Debrix point out that except for seeing and hearing, body and other senses are at rest

in the cinema, thus allowing imagination, stimulated by the filmmaker's emotionally charged, expressly-selected material, to exert deeper and more lasting influence. Mauerhofer refers to the viewer's voluntary passivity and uncritical receptivity; and Kracauer emphasizes the dialectical wavering between self-absorption (leading the viewer away from the image, into personal associations triggered by it) and self-abandonment (the movement toward the image). Perhaps the state of the viewer (as Mauerhofer, the psychologist, and Breton, the surrealist, both agree) is closest to that between waking and sleeping, in which he abandons the rationality of daily life while not yet completely surrendering to his unconcious.

And the image is powerful; he cannot turn from it. For man, perhaps in response to an atavistic memory of fear or child-like joy, cannot resist the attraction of movement (when he enters a room or cinema, his eyes are inevitably drawn to the moving shapes). He cannot "resist" the shocking changes caused by editing, the sudden intrusion of shapes into the frame, the cascading bursts of images flashing by at a rate faster than life,the sensuous power of the close-up looming over him. It is so much easier to turn from the action into a live play. Here the spectator has accepted its unreality (just as he accepted the film's "reality") and since he knows it cannot "reach out" and attack him, he never flinches from stage as he does from screen violence. In both cases, the murdered man rises to be killed another time; but cinema is "closer" to the viewer -- strange tribute to the faculties of a brain more affected by two-dimensional reflections on flat canvas than by live actors performing in three-dimensional space.

And it is a tribute to the power of visuals as such. For in man's evolution, images antedate words and thought, thus reaching deeper, older, more basic layers of the self. Man begins with what he sees, progressing to visual representations of reality. Their transmutation into art does not seem to diminish the images' impact. As holy today as in man's pre-history, the image is accepted as if it were life, reality, truth. it is accepted on a feeling - rather than mind- level. Significantly, it is only if the "suspension of disbelief" is broken by disssatisfaction with a given film that the viewer emerges from his hypnotized state.

And yet, however "authentic" the image, it remains a distortion of life. Not only does it lack depth or density, the space-time continuum, or the non-selectivity of reality, but it emphasizes certain aspects to the exclusion of others by isolation them within a fixed frame in a constantly evolving concatenation of blacks and whites, objects and grounds. This magical invocation of concrete images that seemingly reflects reality while actually distorting it, sets up additional tension between film and spectator;

it increases his sense of dislocation and disquiet and permits further inroads into his ever more vulnerable subconcious.

It is the powerful impact of these brightly-lit images moving in black space and artificial time, their affinity to trance and the subconcious, and their ability to influence masses and jump boundaries, that has forever made the cinema an appropriate target of the repressive forces in society -- censors, traditionalists, the state. While the result has often been its inability openly to project fundamental human experiences or insights, neither repression nor fear seem able to stem an accelerating, world-wide trend towards a more liberated cinema, one in which all previously forbidden subjects are boldly explored. This evolution from taboo into freedom is the subject of this book.

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THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

BLOW UP

(Michelangelo Antonioni, Great Britain, 1966) (F)

Reality can no longer be apprehended by the "naked eye"; the truth hides in the shadows. A seemingly innocent photograph of two lovers in an empty park slowly yields -- in its dot configurations -- a truth not previously apparent: a corpse. To reveal the dirty secret, three levels of created reality are necessary, all involved with vision: the (photographed) photographer; the picture he and we view; and the detail discovered only by the magnifying glass. SC

THE WORLD VIEW OF SUBVERSIVE CINEMA

The notion of the "virginal" artist is untenable.
In order to understand the subversion of modern cinema,
we must go not merely beyond film but beyond art and
explore the evolution of the contemporary world view.
This constitutes the inevitable matrix within which
the artist's creativity and originality operate.

THE NATURAL SCIENCES

The 20th century has brought renewed questioning of the nature of the "objective" world. We do not know what the next hundred years will bring, but we do know that 19th-century notions of reality and science represent a stage of human development already superseded.

We now understand that absolute truth is an unachievable goal. Quantum physics and the theory of relativity have transformed cause and effect" into statistical probabilities. Instead of reliance on a so-called "objective" world picture, we now stress the subjective nature of all experience (only God, said Robbe-Grillet, can claim to be objective). Our "knowledge" of the world first comes to us through our senses, and these are primitive, deceptive, and limited. Though this was already recognized by the early Greek philosophers (1), it is only in our time that the split between perception and cognition has become so shatteringly evident. The "solid" objects surrounding us are, we now know, but swirling masses of electrons, protons, neutrons, and sub-atomic particles: smell, sound, color, and taste are not inherent in these objects but exist only relative to the observer; and mass and energy are equivalent and transformable, as we learned at Hiroshima.

What we know of the world comes to us primarily through vision. Our eyes, however, are sensitive only to that segment of the spectrum located between red and violet; the remaining 95 per cent of all existing light (cosmic, infra-red, ultra-violet, gamma, and X-rays) we cannot see. This means that we only perceive 5 per cent of the "real" world; and that even if we supplement our primitive vision with our equally primitive senses of hearing, smell and touch, we are neither able to know everything nor even realize the extent of our ignorance. (2) P.W. Bridgman points out that "there are so many phenomena beyond the range of our senses that the world of modern physics has become predominantly the world of instruments". (3)

Hence, what we refer to as reality, is only a partial and distorted vision of the "real" world. Recent experiments conducted by Robert Livingston at the Brain Research Laboratory of the University of California offer clear evidence that man rearranges his view of the world to conform to his experience and that ifferent people literally "see" different worlds. (4)

To the modern scientist, "reality" is colorless, soundless, featureless, and impalpable -- a construc of mathematical symbols, based on the mysterious unity of space and time, mass and energy, matter and field. Gravitation, electromagnetism, energy, and atom are revealed as theoretical metaphors, constructed to help man grasp an underlying reality which his sense organs do not otherwise all him to picture. (5) Hence the order we so happily perceive in the cosmos is no more than a reflection of the structure of our minds.

It is therefore possible to question -- without resort to religion -- whether we shall ever fully "know" the objective world. The contemporary answer -- as always subject to revision -- remains unassuring. To the fifty leading scientists and scholars attending a 1972 symposium at the Institute of Advanced Studies at Princeton, it seemed "that the possibility of understanding all of nature -- which is after all, the loftiest goal of all science -- was in question because, through the computer, many disciplines have discovered hitherto unknown strange phenomena. The 19th-century hope that just a little more investigation would reveal the ultimate truths about the workings of the natural world is now virtually gone. Each layer of the onion that is removed reveals not the irreducible core but yet another layer." (6)

We do have more theoretical knowledge than ever before; but as we learn more about structures of underlying reality, we confront growing complexity instead of simplicity and add more to the unknown than to the known. Every solved mystery of the physical world immediately points to another one beyond it. (7) (There is no need to invoke the supernatural; the processes of science -- the unravelling of mysteries -- are as eternal as the universe.) Finally, our inevitable "presence" in nature compromises our necessary scientific objectivity; protagonists and observers, we are what we attempt to observe. (8)

Werner Heisenberg's "principle of interdeterminacy" (1927) seems to introduce a further, perhaps ultimate barrier to our attaining knowledge of the world; it is impossible to observe atomic events without changing them in the process. The high-frequency gamma light rays -- the only possible light source -- damage the electron during observation, preventing us from ever determining its position or velocity. We are "in the position of a blindman trying to discern the shape and texture of a snowflake -- as soon as it touches his fingers or his tongue, it dissolves." (9) The investigation of the most basic particles of the universe therefore can never lead to certainty but only to probability -- a fundamental revision of man's cognitive methadology.

Einstein has revealed a universe in which space and time are relative. The incessant movements of bodies in space can be described only in relation to other bodies, for in space there are no directions or boundaries. Absolute time does not exist; time is only a form of perception and requires an observer. An hour or a day is nothing without an event to mark it and nothing without an observer to observe it. Space is thus simply a possible series of material objects and time a possible order of real events. (10)

Time and space represent a "continuum"; to think of them as separate is arbitrary. Inextricably one, they eternally "flow" into each other, compromising such rickety human constructs as beginning, end, past, and future. "The only definite location of "now" is "here". In fact, every man's "now" is "here" (the "here meaning where he is)." (11)

All reality exists in both space and time; all measurement in time is really a measurement in space and vice versa. Looking through one of our large telescopes means looking not only into space but also "into time" -- the unbelievably distant past (at present, up to 500 million years "back"). (12)

Einstein's universe is incomprehensible to "common sense". It is a universe in which straight lines do not exist, only great circles. It is a finite, yet unbounded universe, curved back into itself; an expanding universe, filled with galaxies that hurtle away from us at 35,000 miles per second. (13)

And there are other universes. To be a scientific rationalist in the 20th century means to acknowledge that most irrational and real universe inhabited by man: his own subconcious. With Freud and those beyond him we are only beginning to unravel the laws governing the demonic ambiguities and incalculable ambivalences of human character, motives, and relations.

Since Einstein, we have continued to discover major new mysteries of the universe; pulsars (pulsating radio-sources) and quasars (quasi-stellar objects), the brightest and most distant objects yet found, whose radiation fluctuates erratically in an unprecedented manner; the variation is equivalent to the sun's multiplying its power several times within a few seconds. No explanation exists as yet as to their nature or source of enormous energy. Processes unknown to contemporary science may be at work, for a single quasar is brighter than an entire galaxy (i.e. a million-million stars) while its mass is estimated at 100 million times the size of the sun. Increasing evidence for the existence of neutron stars (super-dense dead stars weighing ten billion tons per cubic inch), of objects moving faster than light (hitherto considered an impossibility), and of "black holes" (invisible objects of tremendous density and miniscule radius) raise the question whether natural laws as presently understood are "sufficient" to other regions of time and space.

Calamities have befallen man's view of his role in the universe. Our forefathers rested content in the knowledge that the earth was the center of the universe. Under scientific duress they uneasily shifted this center to the sun. But today, in Shapley's beautiful phrase, it is "necessary to write the obituary of anthropocentrism altogether. For now we know that our sun is a simple, very ordinary star, out of billions (100,000 million like it exist in our galaxy alone). Our entire solar system, of which the sun is the proud center, has been relegated to the position of a small glob at the edge of one ordinary galaxy out of billions."

Is man unique perhaps because he is alive? To imagine that life would arise on only one ridiculous planet in the sublime expanses of the universe is in itself a monstrous anthropocentric conceit. Life can and must arise on any planet illuminated by a star on which certain conditions in the evolution of gases and liquids combine properly. In 1953, Stanley Miller, in a celebrated experiment at the University of Chicago, synthesized amino acids, the basic constituents of living matter, by subjecting hydrogen gas, ammonia, methane, and water --

the primeval atmosphere of earth -- to an electric discharge.

Since all galaxies are similar in composition, there is a very high probability that there may exist billions of planets on which life is possible. (14) We have no reason to assume that these planets, if inhabited, are at or near our level of civilization; after all, if the entire life span of earth is represented by a clockface, man appears in all his splendor approximately one second before midnight. Since the average life span of a planet is in the billions of years while -- as in our case -- the change from a primitive into a highly technological society can take place in the brief space of two centuries, the chances of other civilizations being at different stages of development are enormous.

> **The recent discovery of seemingly artificial energy emissions from small well-defined ares and of infra-red objects of extraordinary intensity, invisible to the eye, have once again reminded astronomers of the possibility that highly technological societies may exist elsewhere in the heavens. (15)**

But however "frequent" life may be in the cosmos, it is also tenuous; only one two-billionth part of the radiation of one minor star constitutes the difference between our world civilization (Beethoven, Christ, Hitler) and nothingness, not to speak of our newly developed capacity to destroy all life on earth within seconds of nuclear war. There is no evidence that the life expectancy of technologically advanced societies with nuclear capabilities exceeds a few decades: the explosion in the sky looks like any other stellar catastrophe, ironically reaching other civilizations hundreds of thousands of years later as an impenetrable message instead of as a warning.

It is symptomatic that Macbeth's soliloquy on the insignificance of human life has in our century been transposed into a cosmic plaint in Olaf Stapleton's legendary science-fiction novel *The Starmaker*, with its journeys to untold numbers of cosmic civilizations:

> **In every one of these worlds, thousands of millions of persons were flashing into existence, one after the other, to drift gropingly about for a few instants of cosmic time before they were extinguished. (16)**

Perhaps, then, we must take heart and in an outburst of proud humility, recognize ourselves for what we are in the cosmos: primitive, peripheral, temporal; late arrivals, with a stubborn drive towards great achievement and spectacular evil, struggling to make ends meet in a barely noticeable location in an ordinary island galaxy. And perhaps the cosmos itself is merely an atom in some unimaginable super-universe and electrons the galaxies of microscopic worlds below the realm of comprehension.

But in losing our exalted, God-like position in the universe -- a position based on ignorance -- we are now at last given the opportunity to realize ourselves as part of nature and the cosmos.

> **There can be no better laboratory for the elaboration of thoughts on man's orientation in a complex world than a flowing meadow or a noisy brook or a spiral galaxy. For the green leaves of the**

meadow are sucklings of a star's radiation. The rapids in a brook, responding to universal gravitation, perform erosions such as those that have worn down to oblivion the lofty pre-Alps and the primitive Appalachians. The 100-ton maple tree that calmly dreams through the decades is in the same universe as the Andromeda Galaxy with its billions of seething stars. The tree heeds the impulses of gravitation according to the same rules as those subscribed to by the stars in a globular cluster. Further, the tree is made of the same complex molecular aggregates as are the birds in its branches, the parasites on its roots, and the philosophers who wonder about it. **(17)**

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1968) (F)

Inside the spaceship earthly truths no longer hold. The "positioning" of the figure is fully explicable and "scientific"; the resulting visual shock is not and opens us to a sense of cosmic conciousness.

A NEW GOD ?

Faced with the immensity of the cosmos and its mysteries, scientists experience a sense of awe which offers them a

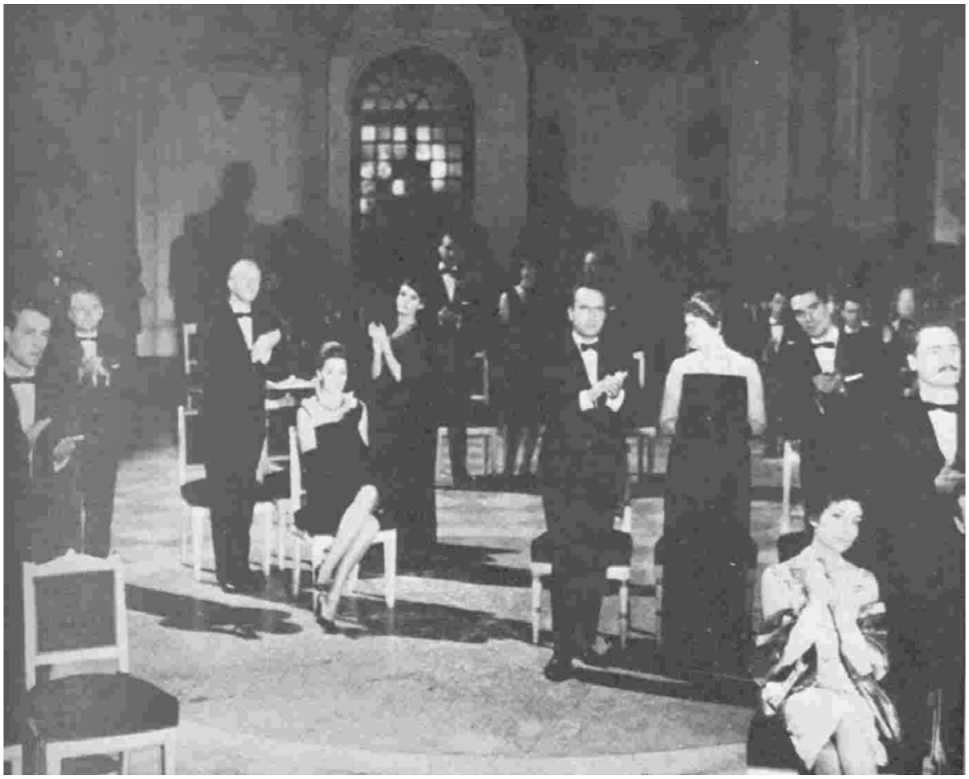
dialectic synthesis between rejection of a personal Earth-God and acceptance of the ice-cold, unapproachable new deity of space. Einstein expresses this most succinctly:

> **The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is inpenetrable really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms -- this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense only I am a religious man.**
>
> **My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable super spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God. (19)**

It is fascinating that one of the greatest scientists here invokes "the impenetrable" and "the incomprehensible", two notions presumably at odds with the scientific spirit for which no ultimate mysteries exist.

But they are also at odds with our age-old concepts of a personal God. As the scope of His presumed kingdom has been revealed to encompass the infinite reaches of the cosmos, it seems ever more presumptuous to believe in the efficacy of a personal prayer or in the appearance of His son on one planet. And Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and Vietnam pose the possibility of a God who is neither benevolent nor omnipotent, but too subtle or cosmically too preoccupied to concern himself with one tiny planet.

But even if we substitute "nature" for "God", we are left with a series of presently or, given our limited sense organs, perhaps eternally unanswerable questions: where did matter "originally" come from? And space? If the universe is curved back into itself, that is the nature of the space "beyond" it? What are its boundaries? We are confronted with the ironic dilemma of postulating two hypotheses, equally untenable for human minds; a universe of infinite duration or one that "ends", with no explanation as to what happens to empty space thereafter.



LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD

(Alain Resnais, France/Italy, 1961) (F)

The upper class "as if" mobilized; perfectly groomed, well-bred puppets, applauding an invisible spectacle, casting ominous shadows ... background to Resnais' intricate web of memory and desire set in a total time-space continuum.

PHILOSOPHY, POLITICS, PSYCHOLOGY

If in our century the modern world view has undergone fundamental transformations in cosmology and science, the same is true of politics, philosophy and psychology. For we have been confronted not merely with the break-up of empires, the decline of Christianity, the horror of two world wars, and the rise of a new barbarism in the technologically most advanced European nation, but also with the betrayal of the first Communist revolution, the philosophical crisis posed by concentration camps and atomic weapons, and the decline of Western hegemony and of bourgeois civilization. The rise of Marxism as a methodology of social science has introduced the notions of relativity and histrocity into the very concept of society itself, positing change as the only constant. And the realities of Hiroshima and Vietnam constitute the end of the myth that other nations are less capable of genocide than was Hitler's Germany. Indeed, America has updated the concept to encompass the destruction of entire countries.

In terms of the collective unconcious of mankind, the result of these developments is a crisis of uncertainty and impermanence, a total questioning, if not destruction, of all values.

The humiliations suffered by man at the hands of modern science and the possi- bility of impenetrable mystery have led to a search for meaning in a world which has none except that which we are able to give it. It is now clear that no master plan exists for the cosmos, no prior intention, no inevitable progress, no pre-ordained harmony between man and universe. And the cosmos is meaningless not only for us. Even more unfathomable, this monstrous, splendid construct of circling, radiating, exploding, expanding masses of matter embodied in a matrix of emptiness, carries no meaning for itself as well; it merely is. Were all life to cease, it would continue in its cycles unobserved.

To Nobel-prizewinner Jacques Monod, the scientific basis for such philosophy resides in recent discoveries about basic organic matter. These demonstrate that life is the product of chance and necessity, thus abolishing the possibility of religious or other systems that assume a masterplan of creation.

> **Armed with all the powers, enjoying all the wealth they owe to science, our societies are still trying to practice and teach systems of value already destroyed at the roots by that very science. Man knows at last that he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe, whence he has emerged by chance. His duty, like his fate, is written nowhere. It is for him to choose between the kingdom and the darkness. (20)**

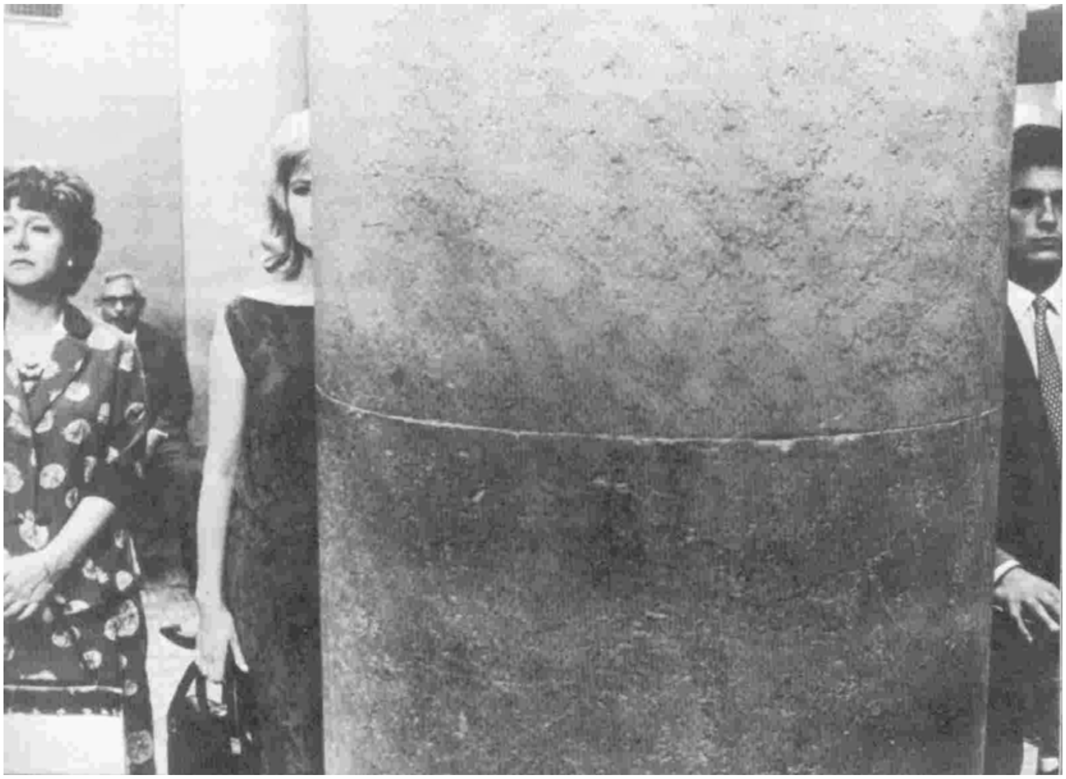
Man has no divine or secular right to the world. Instead, between birth and death, he is forced into an adventure for which no happy end is guaranteed. This is what, in Camus' view, transforms Sisyphus' unceasing, doomed attempt to push the rock up the mountain from punishment into challenge.

> **The universe, henceforth without a master, seems to him neither sterile nor futile. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. (21)**

This bleak "optimism" of existentialism is even more clearly conveyed by Robbe-Grillet: once we deny significance to the world, we also deny it absurdity. There is nothing "absurd" about man's attempt -- against the most severe odds -- to impose his purpose on a world indifferent to him.

But these revelations have proven too horrifying or too difficult for man. As yet another example of his weak cognitive faculties, his conciousness lags far behind existing realities. He therefore clings to such outdated and comforting philosophical tenets as the predominance of Western civilization, the supremacy of reason, the concept of simplistic causality, absolute truth, and fixed certainty; isolated identity and permanent states. (22) Neal Postman propounds as far more appropriate symbols of the nuclear space age a series of concepts almost sadistically designed to repel the conservative mind; relativity, probability, contingency, uncertainty, structure as progress, multiple causality, non-symmetrical relationships, degrees of difference, incongruity.

To wishstand these, we need a new breed of man: flexible, tolerant, innovative, questioning. (23) Only these will be able to dissolve the false antitheses we have unsuccessfully attempted to live by: matter and form, objectivity and subjectivity, imagination and reality, memory and presence. What is perhaps most needed is the quality praised above all by Einstein in his mentor, the Austrian philosopher-scientist Ernst Mach: "incorruptible scepticism".



THE ECLIPSE

(Michelangelo Antonioni, France/Italy, 1962) (F)

Antonioni's entire work projects visual metaphors of non-communication, alientation, solitude -- and desperate attempts to break through to others. But man is over-powered by objects, structures, and the physical world; and people rarely face each other except in tension. SC

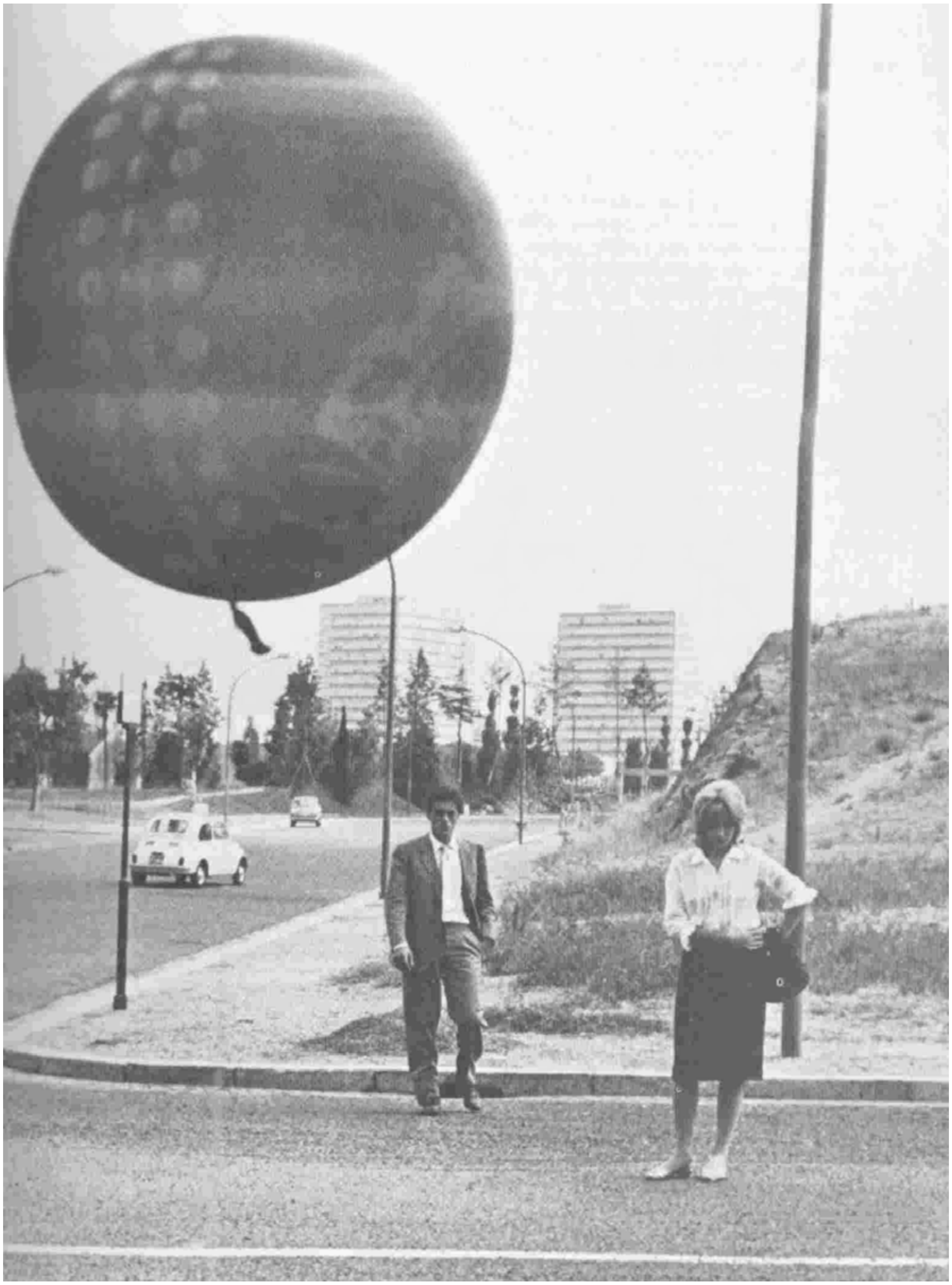
MODERN ART: TRUTH THROUGH SUBVERSION

It is thus no longer possible for an artist creating withing this historical period to portray reality along mimetic lines (art as the imitation of reality) or to view it as a coherent, fully intelligible construct, capable of apprehension through his sense organs and in its documentary aspects, a valid representation of the universe. "In our age, as never before, truth implies the courage to face chaos." (24) The discoveries by Marx, Einstein, Freud, Eisenberg, and Planck, and the decline of a capitalist civilization, previously viewed as immutable, have destroyed forever the myth of stability and permanence and have de-valued realism. At the same time they have revealed poetry and non-linear art as more suitable to the complex fluidities of the modern world view.

The mysteries of microcosm and universe (and man's humble role within it), the realized nightmares of Bosch, Kafka, Baudelaire, and Celine are finally beginning to permeate the collective unconscious of the race, of which the artists are always but the most sensitive and naked barometers:

> **Contemporary man sees himself in his art, not as an idealized godlike figure, in the manner of the classical tradition, but as a disrupted, contorted victim of the modern cataclysm, torn by forces of a magnitude beyond his comprehension, a grim figure, full of despair and anguish, entirely without hope. (25)**

But the process of learning is slow. This is why at the core of modern art stand concepts that still strike scorn or fear into the hearts of many as they are subversive of the very notion of conventional "reality". Dissolution, fragmentation. simultaneity, decomposition -- these are words in the service not of obfuscation but of clarification. They denote not escape from reality, but a more fundamental analysis by a dissection of its ever growing complexity. "The art of our century," says Katherine Kuh, "has been characterized by shattered surfaces, broken color, segmented compositions, dissolving forms and shredded images. During the last hundred years, every aspect of art has been broken up -- color, light, pigment, form, line, content, space, surface, and design." (26) From the fragmentation of color by the impressionists to the broken distortions of the expressionists, from the segmentation of surfaces and planes by the cubists to the surrealists' destruction of space and time, from the abstract expressionists' attack on form and pigment to the dadaist-pop subversion of art and the conceptualists' reduction to structure and non-meaning, the "break-up" of form and content in modern art is complete.



THE ECLIPSE

(Michelangelo Antonioni, France/Italy, 1962) (F)

The wasteland of modern man: nature denuded and subjugated; human movement and interaction amidst concrete; two silent, non-relating buildings, at odd angles to each other, paralleled by the positioning of the human protagonists: cars -- prototypes of technology -- zig-zagging; a perfectly straight, therefore inhuman white traffic line; and, in defiance of rationality, an inexplicable balloon that dominates all. SC

MODERN CINEMA AS MODERN ART

The congruence of these developments in science, philosophy, and art with the evolution of modern cinema is so astonishing that Arnold Hauser, at the conclusion of his monumental study of the social sources of art, postulates film as the paradigm of modern art:

> **The agreement between the technical methods of the film and the character of the new concept of time is so complete that one has the feeling that the time category of modern art must have arisen from the spirit of cinematic form, and the one is inclined to consider film itself as the stylistically most representative (though qualitatively perhaps not the most fertile) genre of contemporary art. (27)**

And so we are confronted by a stylistic, thematic, technological, and idealogical liberation of film from nineteenth-century art. Everywhere the trend is away from illustrated literature and simplistic realism towards a freer, more poetic, visually oriented cinema. Realistic narrative structures, clearly defined plots and characters are increasingly displaced by visual ambiguity, poetic complexity, and restless improvisation. Editing is explosive, elliptic, unpredictable. Camera movements are frequent, free, fluid. Time and space are telescoped or destroyed: memory, reality, and illusion are fused, until, in a flash of frightful revelation, we realize that the totality of these uncertainties and discontinuities reflects nothing less than the modern world view.

Thematically, the simplifications of realism have been left behind: concern with the human condition has not. We are inundated by ambiguity, allegory, and complexity, by an existentialist humanism devoid of certainty or illusion. The enormity of chaos has necessitated enormity of artistic means to portray and dissolve it. The ugly, the grotesque, the brutal, and the absurd provide the truths of a society in decline. Those who depict these truths are the "committed" artists of our day. Far from withdrawing into empty aestheticism, they are themselves anguished configurations of the alienation and deeper wisdom they portray. The simple answers of the 1930s are behind them. On a higher plane, they have returned, instead, to the questions.

If the sum total of their endeavours seems to consist of configurations of anxiety, discontinuity, ambiguity, and tension, the causes reside in spheres beyond their control. Instead, in stately or disorderly array, today's artists imploringly present us with flares in the night -- reflections of terror, symbols of limited hope, allegories of inevitable corruption, warnings of holocausts, and intimations of possible love.

It is on this exalted, adventurous plane that the new cinema perpetrates its errors and its triumphs, providing the mysterious satisfactions of art, the strange delight of "truth parading as illusion", created within a white triangular space of pure light and strips of celluloid.

If these new forms and contents (discussed in the following chapters) prove unpalatable or unintelligible to some, the onus, as always, is not on the artist; he is merely the most nakedly sensitized antenna extended towards our collective secrets. In poetic, oblique, mysterious shapes the inevitably reflects (or prefigures) an era of disorientation, alienation, and social revolution and leads us to knowledge without utilizing the tools of reason. It is up to us to learn to decipher his secret communications and warnings.

FILMS

BLUE MOSES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1962)

One of the very few Brakhage films to have a plot and be acted, this bitter and wise polemic pits an actor who constantly confesses his role against an unseen audience. He sarcastically mocks our belief in filmic truth, disclaiming the omnipotence we ascribe to him and the director and insists on the falsehood and artificiality of the art work. This is a very modern film of ambiguity, mixed tenses, scepticism, and, ultimately, anguish at the realization that the artist is both con-man and magician, impotently straining for unattainable perfection yet inevitably being taken seriously by an audience panting to be duped. **SC**

CANYON

(Jon Jost, USA, 1971)

A silent perusal of the Grand Canyon, morning to night, from a single, fixed camera position, by means of constant dissolves spaced a few seconds apart. Man -- entirely absent -- is no longer the center of the universe; the canyon exists outside of him. Despite the invisible photographer and his technologically-caused dissolves, this is a creditable approximation of the true foreign-ness of nature.

DISORDER (DESORDRE)

(Jacques Baratier, France, 1955)

Fascinating early forerunner of the counterculture, this documentary attempts to render the restlessness and searching of Left Bank youth of the fifties. Letterist poetry, the "beat" nightclubs. Simone de Beauvoir, scenes from an existentialist play, Juliette Greco singing. The message: beauty and order will be discovered only by those who first travel the painful road of confusion and disorder.

THE ECLIPSE (L'ECLISSE)

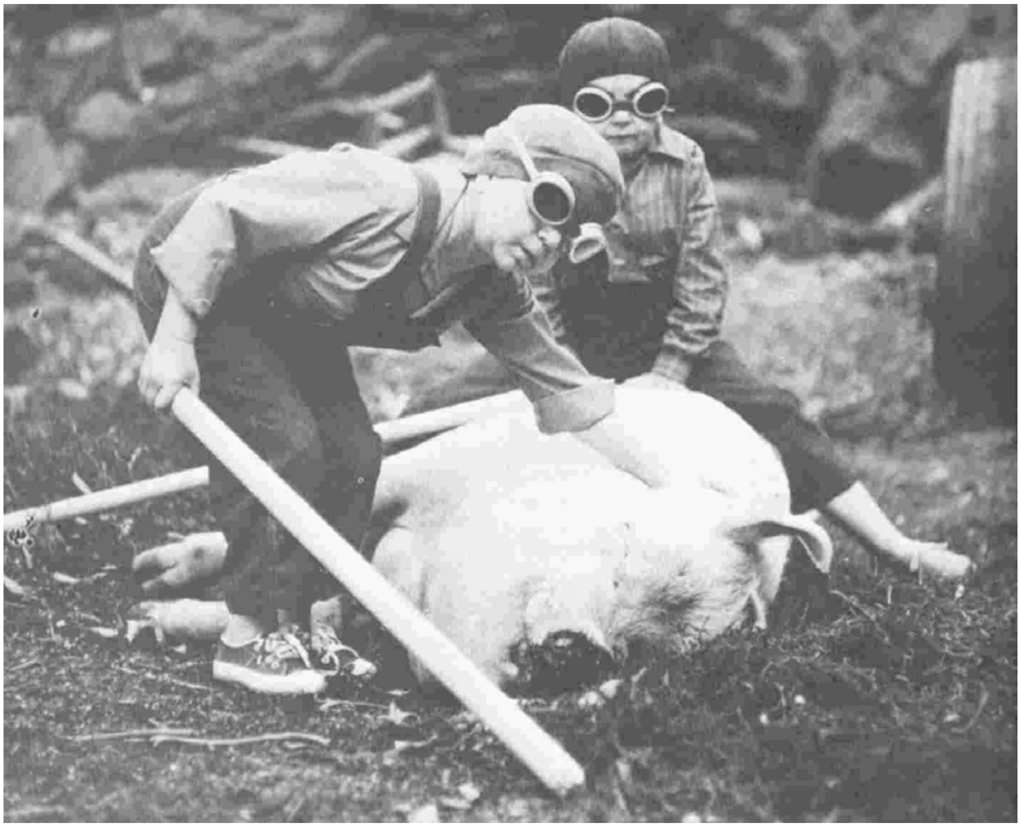
(Michelangelo Antonioni, France/Italy, 1962) (F)

The third of the trilogy which includes *L'Avventura* and *La Notte*, this is Antonioni's ultimate comment on the alienation of man in contemporary society. It is best exemplified by the last part of the film, one of the great sequences in film history. Repeatedly excised by various distributors as "irrelevant", this is, in fact, the film's monstrous climax. The two protagonists have failed to "connect" and do not appear for their date. Instead, in 58 shots lasting seven minutes, we are subjected to an astonishing succession of empty streetscapes (at times referring back to earlier episodes in the film), signs, pavements, shadows, traffic lights, a darkening sky, and then night: a visual metaphor for the eclipse of man. SC

LA JETEE

(Chris Marker, France, 1963)

This mysterious, profoundly disturbing masterpiece -- made up almost entirely of still shots -- is a poignant philosophical speculation on emory, loss and human destiny, permeated by an unbearable sense of nostalgia. Its doomed protagonist -- representing imperfect, yet still human 20th-century man -- is compelled by his scientist-captors after the third (atomic) world war to travel into the past and a more "perfect" future. In a poignant act of self-affirmation and self-destruction, he rejects it to return to our day when there still exists "real" gardens, birds, children, and women. The montage of hundreds of stills shaped into poetic structures by means of rhythmic editing, sensuous dissolves, fades and zooms is entirely unique. The one live sequence is a filmic ode to human love as in a series of continuous, imperceptible dissolves, stills of the girl from the past are transmuted into the haunting reality of her live smile. A subversive defense of human imperfection and romanticism as against technology and totalitariam conformism, the film effects undermines what Marcuse refers to as the "Happy Conciousness" of bourgeois society; after seeing it, nothing remains as it was before. SC



EVEN DWARFS STARTED SMALL

(Werner Herzog, West Germany, 1970) (F)

Double chins, knitted brows, and sagging skins reveal these ominous children to be dwarfs; mystery is achieved by strange caps, over-sized goggles, white sticks, a seemingly dead (murdered?) animal. The image is Kafkaesque in its realistic specificity and metaphysical dread. SC

Set in an unidentified house of correction in a vaguely Spanish landscape, this sardonic, ominous film by Germany's most original young director centers on a misguided revolt against authority. In typically perverse fashion, Herzog's entire cast is made up of dwarfs, a stroke of black humor that elevates this grotesque tale into a metaphor of humanity. This cruel attack on half-baked revolutions -- an insidious call for better ones -- is filled with Kafkaesque episodes, as the dwarfs are repeatedly stymied by normal-size decor and objects that give the action a monstrous aspect: it is, after all, difficult tobe a revolutionary while having trouble reaching doorknobs.

Herzog's masters are Kafka, Celine, and Bunuel, but his imagination is his own. Scene after scene shocks by its brutal audacity. Herzog is irresistably drawn to hyperbole and the bizarre; nothing else will do justice to the insanity of our time. Two blind dwarfs, grotesquely fitted out with caps, black goggles, and sticks, are taunted into ineffectual battle, in which they continually miss their targets. A bizarre procession approaches with burning smoke-pots and a Christ-figure on a cross blasphemously revealed as a monkey. A midget couple is forced into a bedroom to perform a sexual act while watched by the others. The bed is too high. The female finally climbs it with difficulty,

but the male cannot, even after taking a running jump; we "laugh" -- in horror. Perhaps the most disquieting scene occurs at the end, when a midget, suddenly confronted by a mysterious camel, breaks into a horrible, high-pitched, endless laugh. This turns into a scream of anguish, occasionally interrupted by spasmodic, death-like coughs -- a metaphor for Herzog's view of the human condition.

THE GOALIE'S ANXIETY AT THE PENALTY KICK (DIE ANGST DES TORMANNS BEIM ELFMETER)

(Wim Wenders, Austria, 1972) (F)

The story of a man -- a soccer player -- suddenly unable to function or to relate, except in "motiveless" murder; a metaphor for alienation in contemporary life, based on Peter Handke's novel. His world -- a glossy, Americanized Vienna -- is seen as existential mystery, lacking explanation. Fearful matters are touched upon in laconic, strange dialogue. An air of vague dread, intensified by the film's magic realism, permeates the mysteries hinted at but never confronted.

LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD (ANNEE DERNIERE A MARIENBAD)

(Alain Resnais, France/Italy, 1961) (F)

Ambiguity and simultaneity, the space-time continuum, the existence of interior and exterior universes, the bankruptcy of simplistic causality, the abandonment of psychological naturalism, the fusion of illusion and reality, the end of bourgeois individualism, the impossibility of "objective" truth -- all the high signs of the new sensibility are contained in this coldly brilliant classic of the modern film. In retrospect, it represents the apotheosis of the New Novel and New Cinema collaboration as personified by Resnais and Robbe-Grillet.

LIVING IN A REVERSED WORLD

(Theodor Wrismann & Ivo Kohler, Austria, 195?)

Fascinating -- and unintentionally funny -- experiments at Austria's famed Institute for Experimental Psychology involve a subject who for several weeks wears special glasses that reverse right and left and up and down. Unexpectedly, these macabre and somehow surrealist experiments reveal that our perception of these aspects of vision is not of an optical nature and cannot be relied on, while the unfortunate, Kafkaesque subject stubbornly struggles through a morass of continuous failures.

MASCULINE - FEMININE

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1966) (F)

Among all the extraordinary experiments of this extraordinary director,

perhaps this is the one most typical of his concerns and modes of expression. Here, in microcosm or in full bloom, are the basic stylistic and thematic preoccupations of a man who -- more than any other contemporary director -- nakedly displayes the new insights and confusions of our day. Godard has never transcended his ambigious subject matters and anguished political-philosophical enquiries. They are chapters in his long essay of self-realization, still being written on film. Godard, an obsessed humanist constantly torn between radical bourgeois liberalism and revolutionary impulses, is viscerally as well as intellectually at war with contemporary capitalist society. Although masterfully reflecting capitalism's mortal crisis, he is unable to synthesize his insights into how it is to be transcended.

And so *Masculine-Feminine* is not a story film (its "plot" is virtually non-existent) but a view of a generation; a portrayal of Parisian youth of the 60s -- the children, in Godard's words, "of Marx and Coca Cola". Lengthy political discussions, fleeting sexual liasons, the drifting senselessness of adolescent life in a big city, the inundation of conciousness by advertising, consumer goods, posters, slogans, manipulating images; all these co-exist with apparently gratuitous death (a frequent Godard tribute to the existential act); anti-bourgeois shock ("loose" talk about birth control, still illegal in France); extreme emphasis on improvised, intimate interviews (investigations of emotions instead of their portrayal); intrusion of lettering, signs, and philosophical main titles into the action; and long silences and extended one-take sequences, dynamically intercut with quick, nervous passages. When the film is over, instead of having viewed a story that has come to an end, we remain caught up in an ambiance of feeling and understanding that is remarkably modern: non-romantic, bittersweet, ambivalent.

NOTHING HAPPENED THIS MORNING

(David Bienstock, USA, 1965)

An extraordinary, original attempt at pure cubism, simultaneity, atomization of time, space, plot, and narrative, as the camera observes "a most ordinary and truly universal event": waking up, getting ready, departure. An exploration of atmosphere and states of being, the film proceeds on the levels of outer and inner reality and projects yet a third: the "innate", man-less reality of the room and the objects within it, viewed in lengthy, stationary one-shots, silent except for street noises. A forerunner of minimal cinema, but "with a purpose", these scenes are in startling contrast to those involving the man, which proceed at staccato-speed (two-frame-cuts), to the point of annihilation (and more sophisticated reconstitution) of reality. The filmmaker's program note, in its mixture of science and metaphysics, is a pure example of the new world view: "Nothing happens and everything happens -- in the simplest of experiences there is a complexity and vitality unknown and unfelt until the moment when we begin to let its wonder filter into us and flow through our bodies, our minds and our souls. When that happens the ordinary world becomes extraordinary -- the magic of the universe is within each moment and act perceived on as many levels as we can contain. *Nothing Happened This Morning* attempts to capture this state of conciousness in the first twenty minutes of an ordinary/extraordinary morning."

NO MORE FLEEING (NICHT MEHR FLIEHEN)

(Herbert Vesely, West Germany, 1955) (F)

In a desolate, destroyed landscape -- bearing now irrelevant traces of technological society -- a man and a boy try to find their way under a fierce sun. Perhaps this bleak, existentialist film of life after an atomic world war had to come out of shell-shocked, maimed Germany.

One of the more important European avant-garde films of the post-war period, this feature-length work offered a devastating comment on the mid-century European mood. A macabre landscape of impotence and absurdity, peopled by ambiguous travellers, finally explodes into senseless violence. A hypnotic paraphrase of mankind's atomic cul-de-sac (clearly influenced by existentialism), the film has no conventional plot, dealing instead with daydreams, associations and *deja vus*. Set in a stone-covered, sun-parched desert, with remnants of civilization strewn about, the travellers pass through stations of an illusory voyage that increase the feeling of the absurd. A murder occurs without guilt nor prosecution. The world has moved beyond good and evil; since life is absurd, crime is inconsequential. The film analyses of a meaningless existence from which no escape is possible.

RASHOMON

(Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1951) (F)

While this film has always been considered one of the classics of world cinema, it remained for Parker Tyler to analyze it as the archetype of modern sensibility in film. For the killing of the travelling merchant and the rape of his wife by a bandit -- reenacted four times by each of the protagonists and a presumed witness -- results not merely in four different and irreconcilable stories: more perversely, it implies that all are true and false, that "the truth" of a human situation is never simple and that objectivity cannot be achieved. Here cinema approaches the subtleties of Dostoevski, the insights of the Cubists, Futurists, and Freudians into the nature of reality as a multiplicity of overlapping, conflicting, converging strands and layers, each contributing to the "truth" of the whole -- a truth that remains "subjective" and, in terms of certainty, inevitably elusive.

RELATIVITY

(Ed Emshwiller, USA, 1966)

A complex, metaphoric statement of man's place in the universe, from a modernist perspective. Significantly, this draws on both science and metaphysics. The most accomplished craftsman of the American avant-garde, Emshwiller uses his handheld camera as if an extension of a dancer's body, for sensuous tracking shots and intricate movements. Combined with his complete control over tools and technique, this creates a visually dense and mysterious work that comments on man's evolution, the relativity of his striving, his slightly ridiculous persistence, sexual drives, and possibly hopeful future.

TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER (DEUX OU TROIS CHOSES QUE JE SAIS D'ELLE)

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1966) (F)

Paris today: high-rise buildings, anonymous living, and casual prostitution as symbols of capitalist decline: the benevolent dictatorship of the consumer society enforces performance and the "selling" of self so that one may live well. Godard's whispered philosophical comments on the film's action introduce further elements of sophisticated ambiguity.

ZORN'S LEMMA

(Hollis Frampton, USA, 1970) (F)

This radical example of reductive cinema is a warning of things to come: "Meaning" (political, psychological, personal, or whatever) has been eliminated and the work exists purely for itself, demanding attention to structure, pattern and orchestration. Reality is declared impalpable, faceless, incoherent, existing in inexplicable grandeur, independent of is.

"The film's title derives from a mathematical axiom (or "lemma") postulated by the 19th-century German mathematician Zorn according to which "every partially ordered set contains a maximal fully ordered sub-set". It consists of three parts. The first part lasts five minutes: a woman's voice recites from 'The Bay State Primer' (circa 1900) in rhymed couplets. The alphabet is the base for this section. The second part lasts 45 minutes and consists of continuous one-second shots. We see several thousand words, no plurals. Each shot is a word

seen in its natural environment, from signs to graffiti. The last section shows a man, a woman and a dog walking in a field of snow, away from the camera. The soundtrack takes up the one-second beat and we hear six women's voices read one word at a time from a Medieval text on light and form." - Hollis Frampton

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WEEKEND

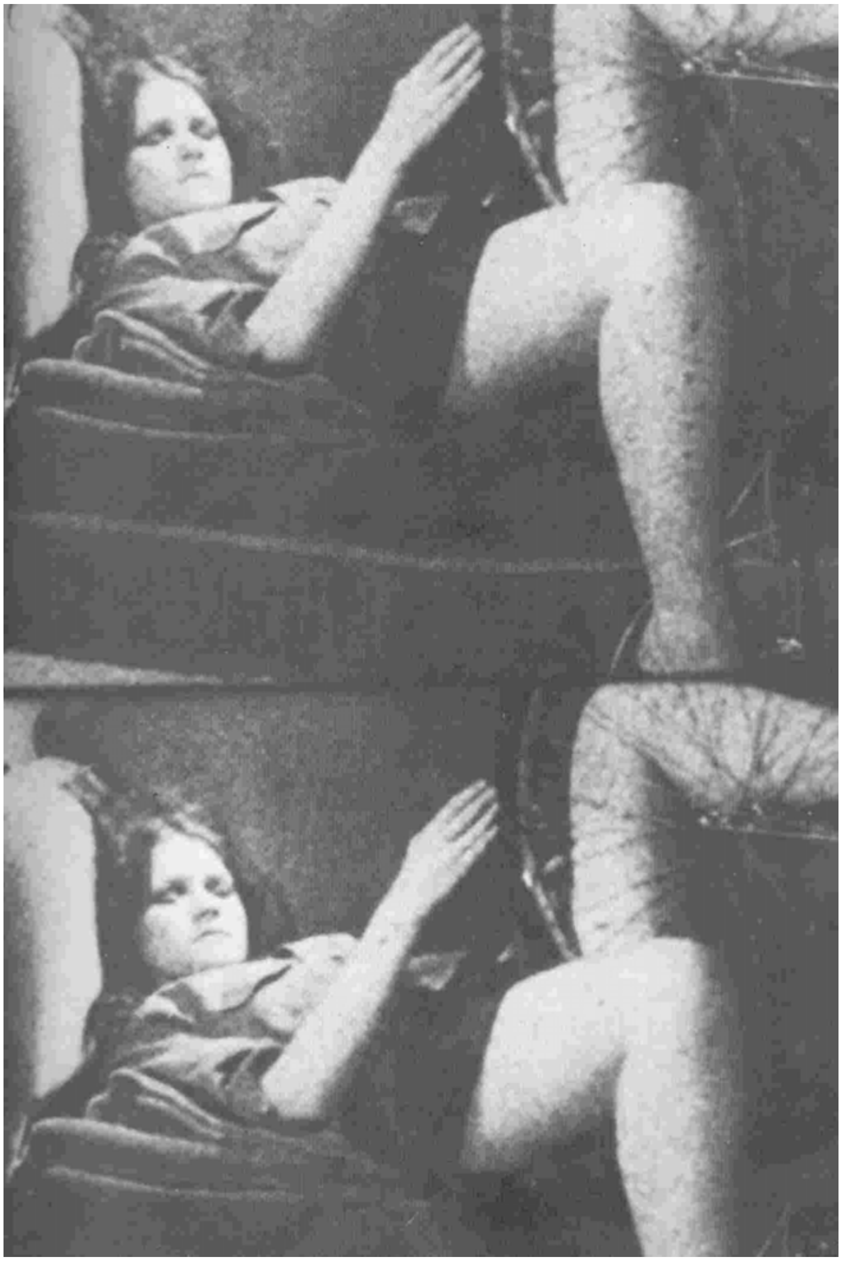
(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1968) (F)

A further vision of the consumer society as hell, in which cars represent modern evil and their destruction becomes a necessary act. A savage, stunning comment on civilization by a great, tortured experimentalist who later went further by breaking with bourgeois cinema altogether. SC

In scenes of rage and violence, one of the most important experimentors of international cinema creates an apocalyptic vision of capitalist consumer society, centering on flaming highway deaths and car crashes -- the end of a civilization exemplified by the automobile. The protagonists -- entirely under the sway of money and materialism -- plot each other's deaths, poison relatives, kill on the highway, and emerge in the end as cannibals and victims. The world is seen as absurd and violent. Greed, competition, and lack of feeling are the absolute and all-pervading evils. Even the guerillas, possible prototypes of the future, are corrupted by the society that spawned them.

One of Godard's most mature and most political films, *Weekend* also presaged his subsequent rejection of his entire oeuvre as bourgeois.

It contains three of his most famous sequences, each, significantly, idealogically related to minimal cinema. In the first sequence, a young woman, her face visible in outline only, sits on a table close to the camera, in panties and bra, legs pulled up to her chin, and talks to a man in the background about her sexual feelings and experiences. Though nothing "happens", this is one of the most erotic scenes ever filmed. The second sequence involves an excruciatingly slow 360-degree pan, executed three times, around an uninteresting farmyard and a group of bored peasants, who are not listening to a weird musician mouthing a (Malraux!) speech about culture to the accompaniment of Mozart. The camera moves in perfect, ironic paraphrase of the classicism of music and voice. At the end, fatigue and comment are complete. The final, most famous sequence involves a seemingly interminable horizontal pan along the lengths of a monstrous highway traffic tie-up revealing crashes, indifferent drivers, boredom, playing children, death: an original, terrifying metaphor for the decline of civilization.



WHY NOT

(S. Arakawa, USA, 1970) (F)

The passionate, masturbatory union of young woman and inanimate object seen as the apotheosis of alienated eroticism; minimal art, touched by emotion, here becomes a terrifying equivalent of the human condition.

Unquestionably a major work of the American avant-garde of the 70s, *Why Not* is hypnotic, compulsive and claustrophobic. It is bathed in a cold, pervasive eroticism, which, oblique and displaced at first, finally becomes explicit in one of the most bizarre masturbation sequences ever filmed. For almost two hours, we observe a young, strikingly pretty girl, nude most of the time and alone in an apartment, engaged in a sonambulistic and sensuous attempt at coming to terms with herself. We first see her encircling, embracing, encompassing a round, white formica table. She undresses, mounts it nude, rubbing

against it in a vain attempt to possess it. Lather, this same tactile, sensuous exploration occurs with a door, a doorknob and a latch, all of which are compulsively manipulated. She fingers an orange and, simultaneously, one of her breasts, with her eyes closed. Overpowered by the objects around her, she attempts to wrest their mysteries from them and to define her relation to them; even a toilet is explored as a new object. In an extraordinary scene, she props up the legs of a heavy sofa with some books, just enough to allow her to slip under it, and then systematically removes them to feel fully the growing weight of the sofa upon her as she tries to extricate herself; the heavy, sado- masochistic sensuality of this scene is remarkable.

The most important -- and sensational -- scene of the film, almost 15 minutes long, involves a minutely detailed and seemingly "real" act of masturbation with a bicycle wheel. As the girl reclines on the sofa in mounting ecstasy, the wheel is first fondled, then pressed against her crotch, moistened by mucus transferred from her mouth to a handkerchief, and ever more rapidly rotated with one hand. The passionate union of this beautiful young woman with an inanimate object represents a simultaneous apotheosis of eroticism and alienation: her voluptuous exhaustion and playful toying with the wheel after her "lover" has left her without parallel.

The fact that Arakawa is a painter contributes to but does not explain the striking plasticity of the film, the palpable, opressive closeness of shapes, objects and visuals. The room, innocent in its simple, antiseptic modernity, imperceptively changes from environment into devourer; objects are transformed into myths and methaphors. We see them, as does the protagonist, with an exceptional lucidity and profound tactile sensuality, and are riveted not by a conventional story but by a state of mind. The ritualized style reinforces the film's internal, hallucinatory intensity and the obsessive power of its images.

Throughout it all, the camera remains alienated from the action, a cold-hearted observer, reminiscent of early Warhol, almost sadistic in its concentration. It does not flinch from showing whatever comes before it, even her bush as she crawls, sits, or straddles. But it does so in a totally documentary, non-sensational manner, light-years removed from both the intentional, titillating avoidance of nudity in commercial films (in scenes where it is required), or the unerotic revelation of gaping cunts in the "beaver" movies.

Ultimately, and by purely visual means, the film reveals itself as a comment on the torture of self-knowledge, the madness of loneliness, the sweetly lethal nostalgia of memory. A great, very modern sadness and nightmarish heaviness inform the film. Here minimal art, deeply touched by emotion, becomes the terrifying equivalent of the human condition. Is not the girl -- totally self-centered, tortured by that which no longer exists, alienated and relating only to objects, highly eroticized, and involved in lacerating self-exploration -- is she not a mirror of ourselves today in the disaster which calls itself our civilization?

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THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

BY THE LAW

(Lev Kuleshov, USSR, 1926)

Three people, related by murder, trapped in an Arctic wilderness amidst mounting psychological tension. Plot, decor, and style are stripped to their essence, thus making gestures and small events loom larger. The agitated yet formal composition of the still relfects the film's ordered melodrama.

THE REVOLUTIONARY FILM AVANT-GARDE IN SOVIET RUSSIA

To anyone acquainted with the Soviet cinema of the Stalin era -- a numbing succession of academic, conventional, "bourgeois" works reflecting the ossified ideological superstructure --

a return to the great Soviet masterpieces of the 1920s is the equivalent of a trip to another planet. As in politics, the two periods are aesthetically and thematically poles apart.

Never before had there existed a state-financed, nationalized cinema entirely devoted to subversion as was built in Russia after the October revolution. The creation of a new conciousness, the destruction of reactionary values, the demolition of myths of state, church, and capital -- these objectives were to permeate the ideological superstructure of the proletarian state, its arts, its education. And the cinema --- in Lenin's view, the most important of the arts -- was to assume a central role in the struggle; for it was the art form most accessible to the dispersed, illiterate masses.

Several factors contributed to the unprecedented explosion of creative energy forever linked with the towering achievements of the early Soviet cinema. Among these were the profoundly liberating, innovative tendencies freed by the liquidation of the former regime, the exuberant hopes for the creation of a first society of equality and freedom, and the Lenin-Trotsky-Lunacharsky decision, despite their insistence on proletarian dictatorship, to permit freedom of expression to the various artistic tendencies beginning to develop. This was particularly significant, since Lenin's views on the arts were conservative and tinged by that same ascetic puritanism so often found in the revolutionary movement.

The result was an unprecedented flowering of diverse avant-garde and intellectual tendencies in theatre, painting, literature, music, and cinema -- unique also in being self-financed. This cultural proliferation saw the growth of constructivism and futurism and the absorption into the Soviet experience of expressionism and surrealism. From 1917 into the early twenties, the congruence of avant-garde art and radical ideology, the fusion of form and content (so hotly debated in the West ever since, and not so secretly the subject of this book) existed in action. For a brief, glowing second of historical time, the commitments of the vanguard artist and the society around him almost coincided. This achievement of the October revolution will never be eradicated; yet, just as the promise of a new society faded into the gruesome obscenities of Stalin's state-capitalist totalitarianism, so did the wedding of avant-garde and state prove temporal. The eternal tension between organized society and creative artist reasserted itself in the particularly brutal form of suicides, secret deaths, exile, emigration, or abject surrender. The price paid by Stalin in the arts for the internal consolidation of a regime of terror was -- as in Hitler's Germany -- the total eradication of modernity and the creation of a perverse picture-postcard Kitsch "art", criminally referred to as "socialist realism". Since social liberation is impossible without personal freedom (which includes the freedom of all art forms to develop), the only person truly "subversive" of the values of the October revolution was Stalin.

In retrospect the basic political and aesthetic tenets of the early Soviet cinema can be summarized as a fundamental subversion of filmic content and form. In content, it constituted rejection of the individualism, sentimentality, and aestheticism of ruling-class art, a passion for the grasping and taming of reality, and the creation of archetypes and

revolutionary conciousness. In form, early Soviet cinema manifested an aggressive rejection of conventional methods and systems and a profound concern with the theory and language of film, influenced by the formalist critics Shklovsky and Jacobson, forerunners of structuralism. These elements recur in the philosophical and aesthetic writings as well as in the films of the director-theoreticians who created an entire art in their image and made the Soviet Cinema world-famous.

FILMS

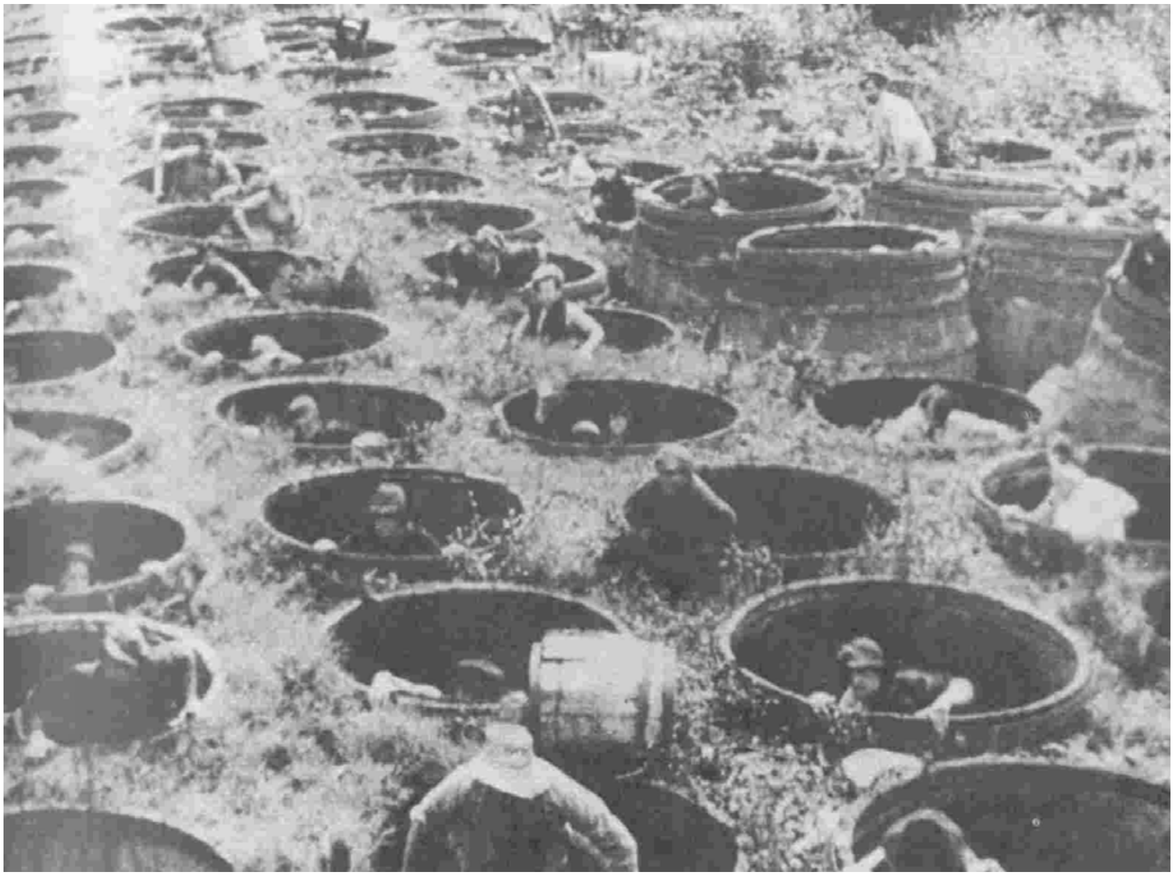
STRIKE (STACHKA)

(Sergei M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1925) (F)

The genius of Soviet cinema was Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein. Filmmaker, teacher and theoretician, his writings on film constitute brilliant syntheses of philosophy and aesthetics amidst a morass of mediocrity. Member of a minority nationality (a Jew born in Riga), cosmopolitan by nature and a man of wide culture, this complex internationalist proved too sophisticated and perverse for the earthy conservatism of Stalin. His life therefore reads like a tragic caricature of the successful, frustrated, eternally haunted artist. Though he left us *Strike* (1925), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *October* (1927), *The Old Man and The New* (1929), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944-46).

Eisenstein's life was an unbroken series of abandoned projects. His films were shelved by official fiat; they were banned, mutilated, or worse, self-censored. His was a life of powerful and uncertain official position, of compromise and emasculation, of abject self-criticism and isolation within triumph. Eisenstein is the archetypal tragic artist who cannot "fit" into any establishment; his ill-fated ventures in the USA (Dreiser's unfilmed *An American Tragedy*) and in Mexico (with Upton Sinclair) testify to his inability to co-exist with capitalism as well. (1) In the end, emasculated by the bureaucrats in the East and the financiers in the West, one of the few authentic geniuses of cinema died in embitterment and impotence.

Strike, his ill-fated first film -- a veritable compendium of experimental cinema -- is not even supposed to exist. Attacked in Russia and renounced in later years by Eisenstein himself, banned in several countries, not shown in others, it was officially declared "lost" under Stalin and "rediscovered" in the Soviet archives only after his death. A major work, it prefigured in embryonic form the major tenets of Eisenstein's aesthetic. As such it is indispensable for understanding film as a subversive art.



STRIKE (STACHKA)

(Sergei M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1925) (F)

Expressionism, Commedia dell'Arte, a love of the bizarre, and a strong feeling for visuals and compositions converge in this extraordinary shot of Lumpen-protelarians emerging from their "homes" to become police provocateurs against the striking workers.

EDITING AS THE ESSENCE OF FILM ART

The essence of film art for Eisenstein lies in the creation of a new psychological reality by means of creative editing (montage). Increasingly dissatisfied with the too limited (because static) realism of theatre. Eisenstein had made a final abortive attempt to force immediacy by staging the play *Gasmasks* inside a factory. He then turned to cinema under the slogan: "Away from Realism -- to Reality!" A profound, possessed adherent of visual culture, he firmly placed the image at the center of his filmic ideology, but only as it existed in relation to subsequent or preceding shots; cinema was seen as an art of conflicts between images. A technical process (the ordering of strips of film into logical, narrative sequence) was thus transformed into an aesthetic act. The cinema became an art of the laboratory, not of the act of shooting: events, seen in real life as a continuous, integrated flux of objects in motion, were "cut" by the director-editor into discrete segments (mere snatches of reality), then dynamically joined in combinations designed to create a new reality.

In a not entirely tenable analogy with Japanese character writing,

Eisenstein explains creative editing as a multiplication rather than addition of separate effects. Just as the Japanese character for "dog" and another for "mouth" form, when juxtaposed the character for "bark", so the juxtaposition of two shots creates an entity greater than the sum of its components (as in Gestalt psychology). Each shot is an object: but in their combination, shots create concepts -- metaphors, symbols, a new grasp of underlying intellectual concepts.

Montage works by the collision of two pieces of film, not by their mere "joining". Eisenstein insists on the presence of montage, conflict and contradiction in all the arts -- surprises, disproportion, distortion, unexpected combinations, and, most importantly, irregularity. (2) As the brain is confronted by the unexpected, it moves back and forth in confusion and excited agitation in an immediate, inevitable search for relationships and does not come to rest until a new "understanding" is reached. Here Eisenstein parallels the Surrealists' insistence on unexpected juxtapositions. Thus editing is not peaceful, but rather like "a series of explosions of the internation combustion engine to drive a car (film) forward ... " The conflicts between shots or even within a single shot might be those of scales, volumes, masses, graphic direction, close-up as against long-shot, darkness against light, image against sound. Each of these tensions is, as Gyorgy Kepes puts it, "resolved into a meaning configuration. These configurations in turn serve as a basis for further tensions: consequently for further configurations. Contradiction is the basis of dynamic organization of the associative qualities of the image." (3)

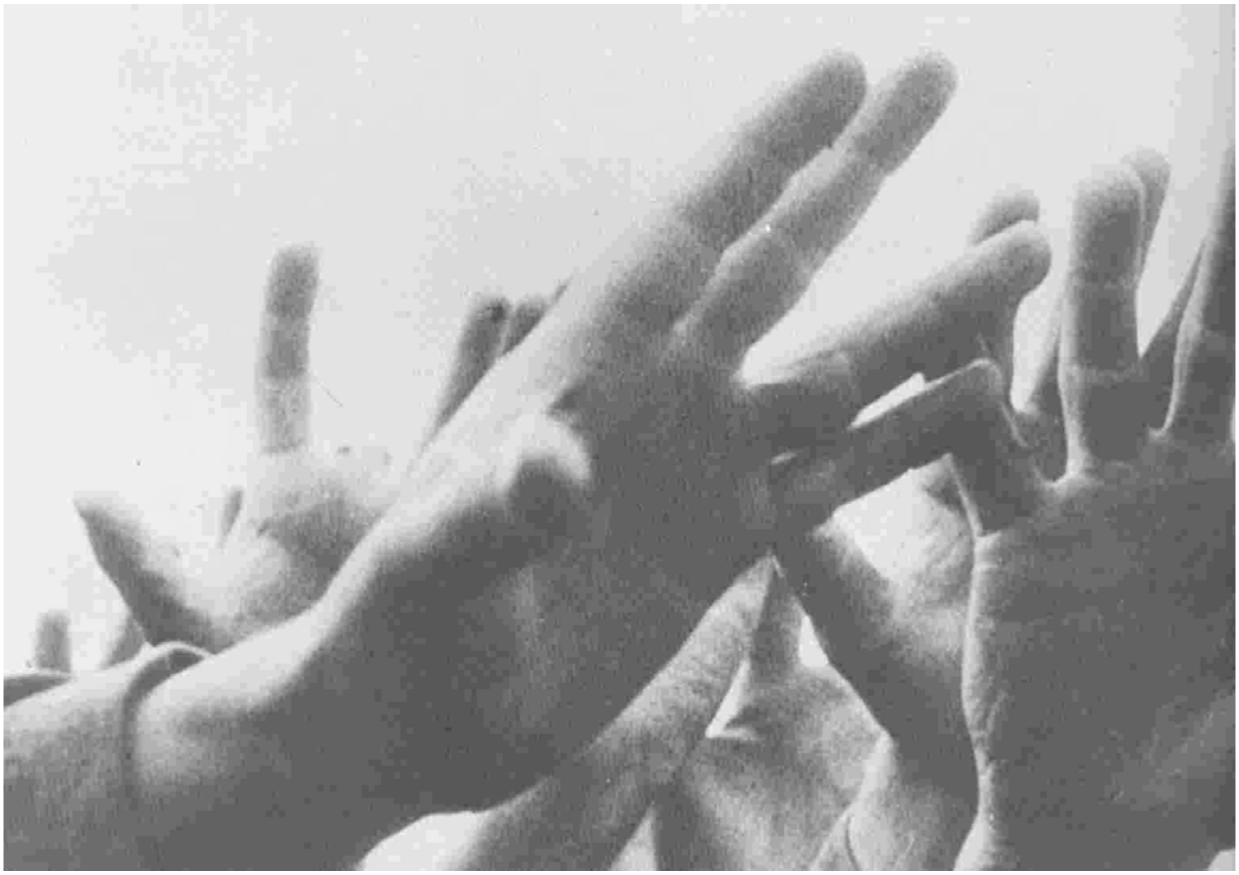
Editing, then, is not merely combining what is visible in individual shots, but making conscious invisible concepts arising from their combination -- the chains and clashes of psychological associations diabolically contrived by the artist for maximum shock.

To Eisenstein, the concept of collision was the expression in art of Marxist dialectics -- the movement of all nature from thesis to antithesis to synthesis. It also represents the subverting of objective reality and of the unwilling spectator, who is thereby raised to new levels of comprehension by the manipulations of the director.

In *Strike*, this emphasis on "collision" is carried out in almost every one of its thousands of shots by such technical devices as changing the size of the image within the frame, unorthodox dissolves and iris effects even to the combining of the two), split screen, slow and reverse motion, unexpected camera movements and angles, double exposures, the use of masks to hide or reveal portions of the image, the sudden intrusion of objects and limbs into the frame, the introduction of new locales and/or characters without prior explanation. Even the titles interspersed throughout form part of the montage, since their wording, typography, length, and positioning (precisely specified by Eisenstein) are integrated into the rhythm of the film. Throughout, there is deliberate visual manipulation and mystification to put the spectator into a state of permanent psychological tension.

The best example of Eisenstein's montage methods occurs in the famous sequence in which the four capitalists dealing with the strike are seated in the plush comfort and isolation of their mansion, smoking and drinking.

Through cross-cutting, we now see, in this order: workers at a clandestine strike meeting; the capitalist putting a lemon into a juice extractor; the workers discuss their demands; the handle of the juice extractor descends to crush the fruit; the workers are charged by mounted police; the boss says in an inter-title: "Crush hard and then squeeze!"; the workers are attacked; a piece of lemon drops on to the well-polished shoe of the capitalist; disgusted, he uses the paper containing the workers' demands to wipe it off. The juice extractor both embodies the force used to crush the strikers and simultaneously implicates the bosses in the action.



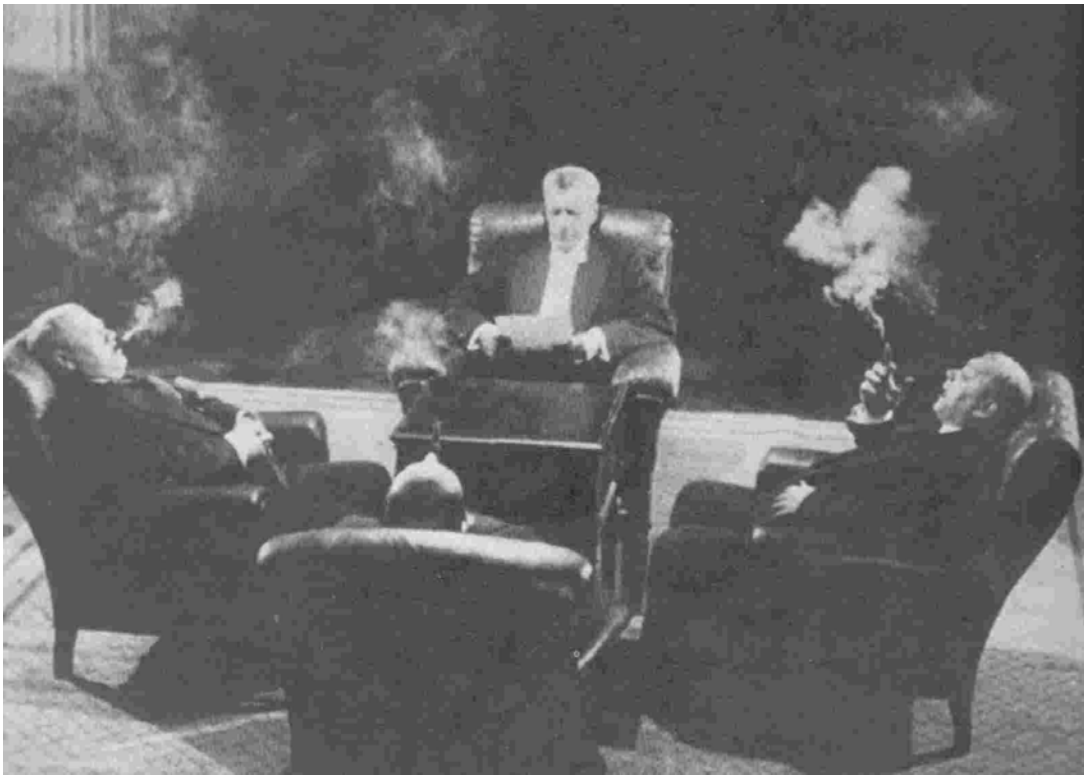
STRIKE (STACHKA)
(Sergei M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1925) (F)
Aesthetic and formalist preoccupations of Soviet film avant-garde join with ideological content: the hands of striking workers, raised in supplication or self-defense against the attacking police. Dynamic utilization of frame area.

STYLIZATION AND TYPAGE

From his life-long preoccupation with circus, music hall, Commedia dell'Arte, and Kabuki Theatre, Eisenstein derived the concept of "typecasting". This entailed the creation of composite "stock" types -- worker, capitalist, spy -- a distillation of the most significant traits of a particular social "type". Eschewing subtlety or the "building" of character as bourgeois individualism, Eisenstein portrayed the "essence" of social types for purposes of propagandistic art. In *Strike*, capitalists

are fat, smoke cigars, wear top hats, grimace frequently, are vicious, oppressive, spoiled, and sensual (a peculiar equation of sex and the ruling class); to increase their grossness and power, they are frequently photographed from below. In a similar manner the stock characters in Commedia dell'Arte, Punch and Judy shows, and the films of Chaplin (whom Eisenstein greatly admired) move through pantomime and slapstick to portray easily identifiable "types".

Since Eisenstein, "typage" has become a favorite tool of propaganda films, used by political systems of every persuasions to attack their enemies in the most direct, most simplistic manner possible.



STRIKE (STACHKA)
(Sergei M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1925) (F)
The Ruling Class: plush comfort, cigars (excessively used), reclining figures sure of being "on top". As in Commedia dell'Arte -- a life-long influence on Eisenstein -- the director works with easily identifiable stock types. Strong formal composition avoids superfluous decor and concentrates action in the center.

SUBSTITUTION OF COLLECTIVE MAN FOR INDIVIDUAL HERO

Customary bourgeois tales of individual sorrow or sex, eternal triangles, and unrequited or orgiastic love affairs were eliminated by Eisenstein in favor of dramas involving the movement of classes or masses. In *Strike*, the protagonist is "collective action" -- an episode of mass struggle in pre-revolutionary Russia. Despite its propagandistic intent, the film is suffused with an aestheticism that proved anathema to the regime

and later to Eisenstein himself. A work of youth -- free, exuberant, passionate, full of "errors" -- it reveals a genius exploring a new language in a gushing excess of imagination. Clearly the story itself -- the suicide of a worker leading to an ill-fated strike -- seems in retrospect secondary to his basic preoccupations. But Eisenstein was never to systemize his structuralist concern with the new vocabulary and syntax of cinema, though he continued to explore them in his films, his teaching and writing.

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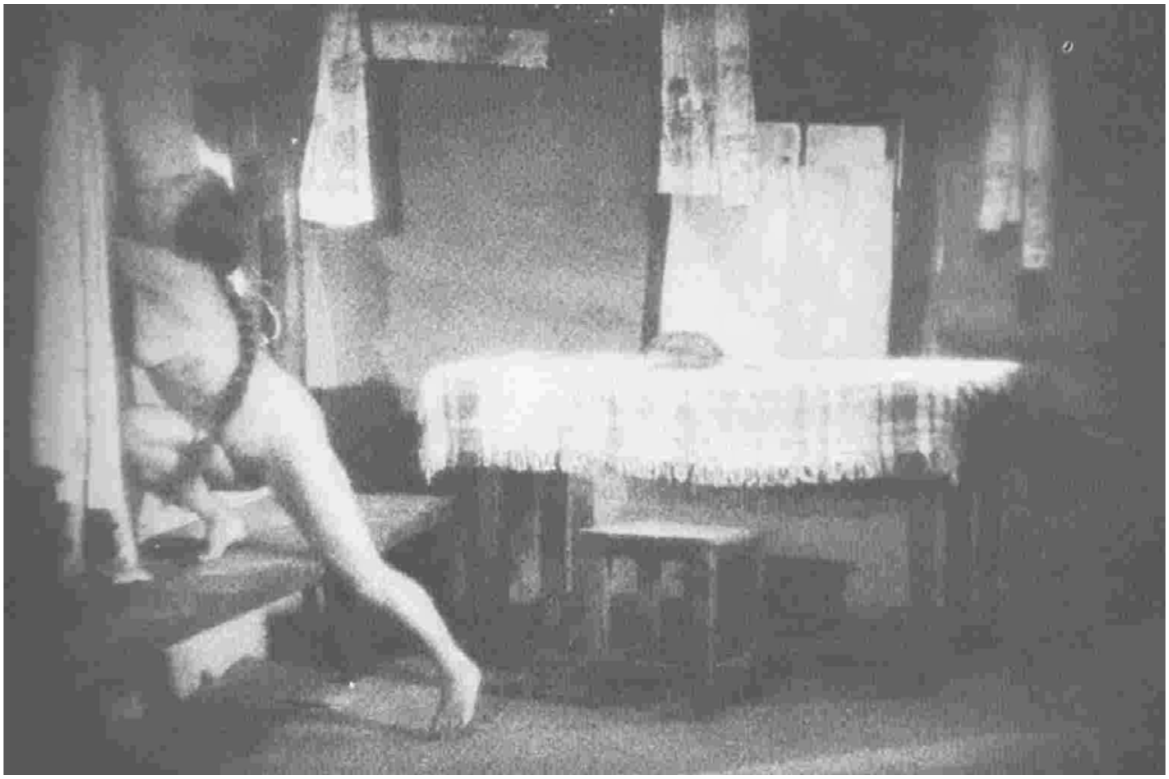
(1) See Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, New York, A.A. Wyn
(2) Sergei M. Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 1949
(3) Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision*, 1967



EARTH (ZEMLYA)

(Alexnader Dovzhenko, USSR, 1930) (F)

Excised by Stalinist censors, this sequence -- unique in Soviet cinema because of its nudity -- violently conveys the irrational despair of a young woman whose lover has just been murdered. Strong horizontal and vertical lines (table, chair, curtains) are disturbingly broken by the opposing diagonals of woman's body and bench.

In retrospect, Alexander Dovzhenko emerges as one of the most profound talents of the Russian cinema, the man who raised it from the encrustations of propaganda and intellectualism to the level of visual poetry. The destruction of realistic time and space occurs here -- as it does in advanced contemporary cinema -- as a necessity of poetic art.

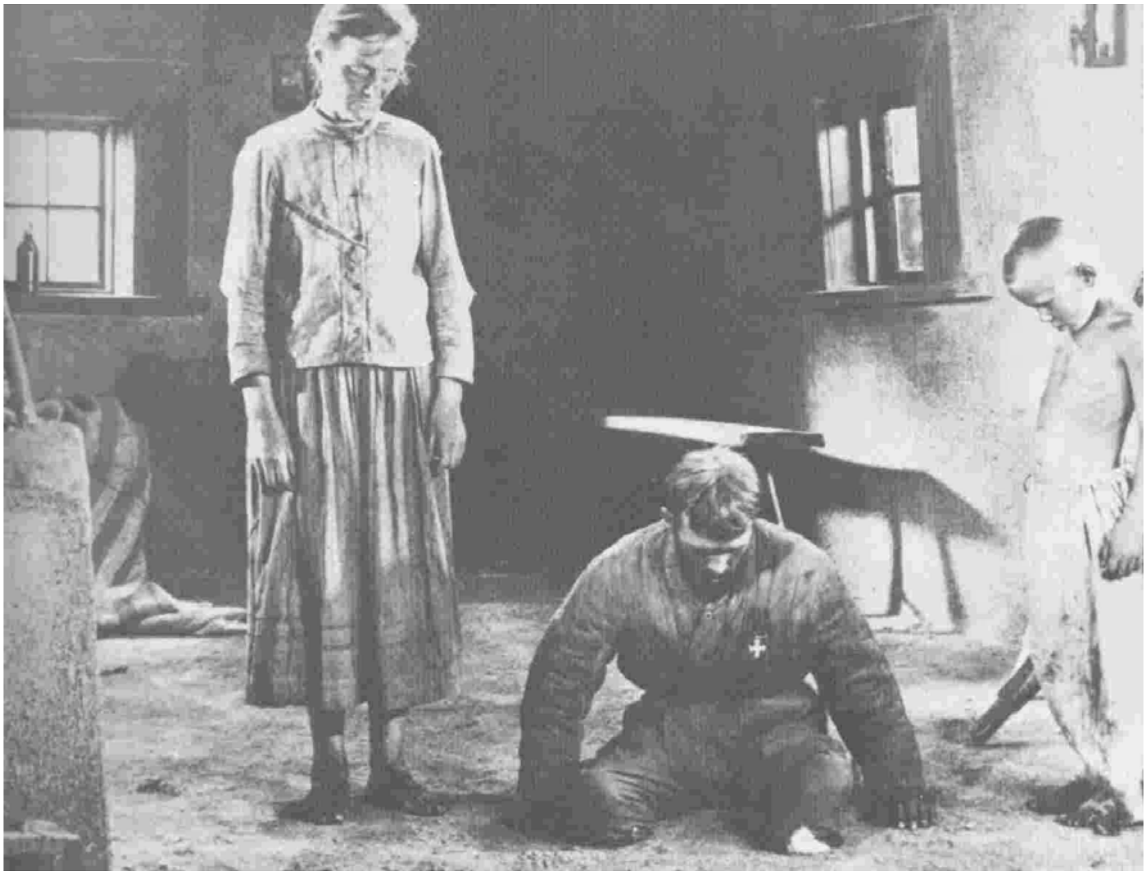
Aesthetically revolutionary, *Earth* was "rightfully" attacked by conservative Stalinist commissars who distrusted its poetic freedom, pantheist lyricism, and the "cosmic" manner in which it absorbed (instead of liquidating) the class enemy.

The "plot" is minimal, ideologically safe: the kulaks in a Ukranian village are opposed to the purchase of a tractor by the young peasants and arrange to have their leader murdered. But the film's significance lies elsewhere, in its one to the oneness of man and nature, to the joys and terrors of existence, in its overpowering procession of lyrical images, each larger than life.

***Earth* exists entirely in episodes: the peaceful, smiling death of an old peasant among his apple trees; the almost hallucinatory dance of the doomed young leader down a deserted, moonlit country road -- a hymn to the human spirit -- which continues wordlessly for minutes and ends in sudden murder; the distress of his fiancee who tears off her clothes in spectral despair -- a sequence unique in Soviet cinema for its nudity (promptly removed by Stalinist censors but preserved in an uncensored copy discovered in 1958.)**

Stylistically, the film is spectacular in the originality with which conventional structure is replaced by poetic continuity. It is framed by lyrical imagesf of sky and soil, of the richness of nature's fruit. It portrays man's place within a pantheist universe of fertility, life and death. A series of passionate episodes -- more powerful than the plot -- anticipates the concerns of contemporary and avant-garde cinema in its exploration of states of being.

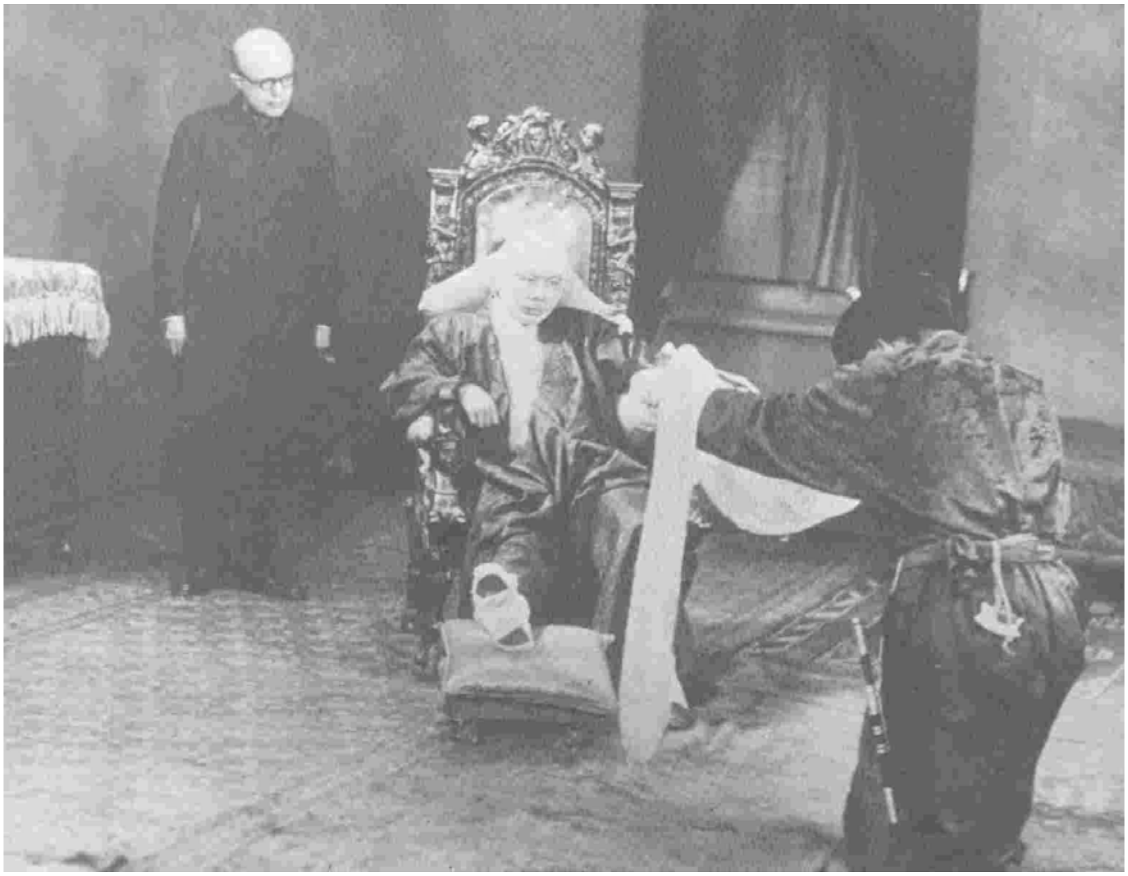
Much of the film consists of a succession of beautifully sculptured peasant portraits of great plasticity. These are photographed in medium shot or close-up, in attitudes and motions of joy, repose, expectation or fear, separated by slow fades. Though representing social "types", these are the real faces of the Ukraine far removed from propagandistic simplifications. Constant tension is maintained by the massing of related images into repeated climaxes; several scenes resemble frozen shots but are posed by immobile actors in attitudes of pregnant stillness. Following the son's murder, an identical scene of his father mourning, immobile at a table is repeated three times -- separated by slow fades. Throughout, time is concentrated to the utmost. Decor, events, motivations are reduced to an epic, very modern simplicity. The real significance of the film resides not so much in its content as in its subversion of established form; it is a masterpiece of modern cinema thirty years ahead of its time.



ARSENAL

(Alexnader Dovzhenko, USSR, 1929) (F)

Poverty and despair as a political and aesthetic experience; the stark realism of minimal decor and attire is reinforced by painstaking composition and lighting. The shocking juxtaposition of military decoration and debility caused by war provides an ideological and compositional center.



STORM OVER ASIA (POTOMOK CHINGIS-KHAN)

(V.I. Pudovkin, USSR, 1928) (F)

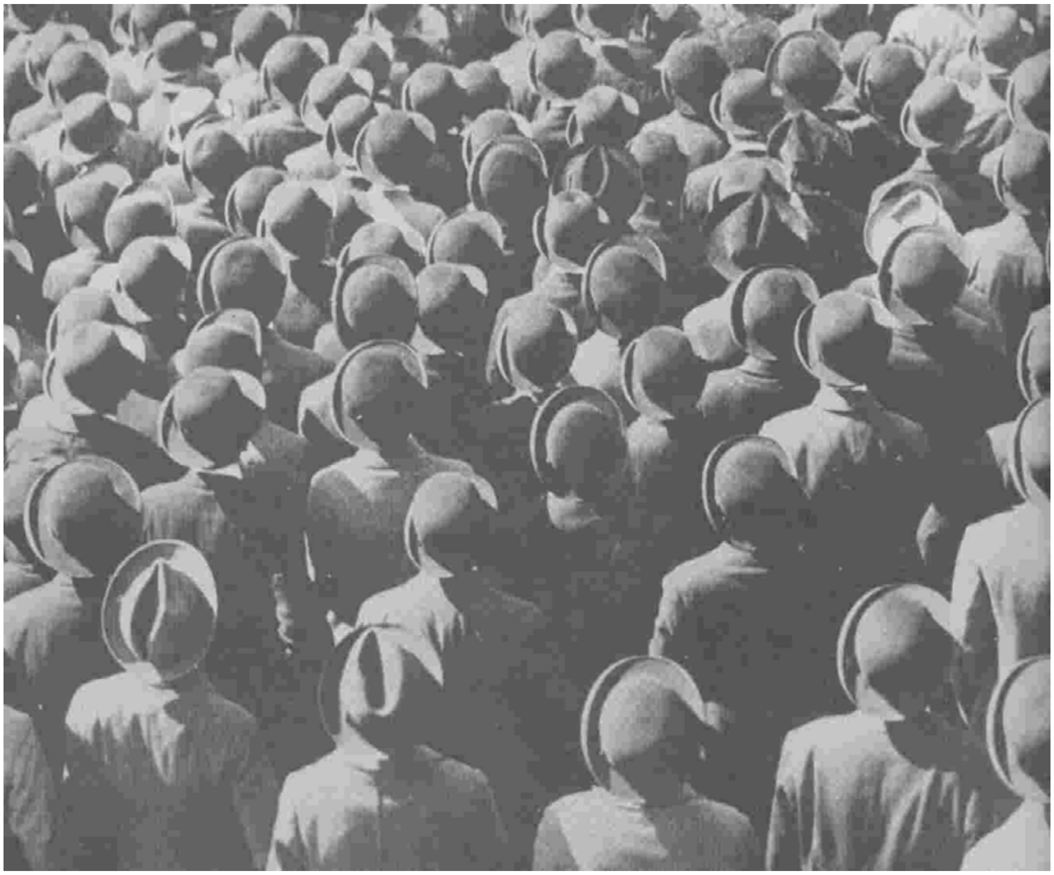
Having just wounded him in a botched execution attempt, the British White Army and its clerical collaborators -- East and West -- now attempt to woo this Mongolian guerilla into becoming their puppet ruler, falsely assuming him to be a descendant of Genghis Khan. His rebellious innocence, however, has been replaced by revolutionary distrust, revealed in a strongly diagonal composition converging on the center.

One of the four giants of the early Soviet cinema, Vsevolod Ilarionovich Pudovkin, is at once more sensuous and less cerebral than Eisenstein or Vertov. His films tend more towards clear-cut, simple stories in which a particular carefully drawn human fate serves as a statement of universal relevance. This frequently is the attaining of revolutionary consciousness by the oppressed, learning from the experience of life. The intentional simplifications of character and situation are inherently in accord with the requirements of silent cinema. The style is almost lyrical, of great psychological resonance, vigoriously naturalistic but with strong expressional overtones, depending heavily on complex, almost mathematcal montage and rhythm. ("I claim that every object shown on the screen to the spectator is a dead object, even if it moved before the camera, until it has been edited.")

During the 1920 Russian civil war, a young Mongolian is falsely assumed by the British White Army to be a descendant of Genghis Khan and is

therefore used as puppet to legitimatize its invasion. He discovers the imperialists' true intentions, and, at the head of a suddenly huge horde of mounted revolutionaries, drives them from the country.

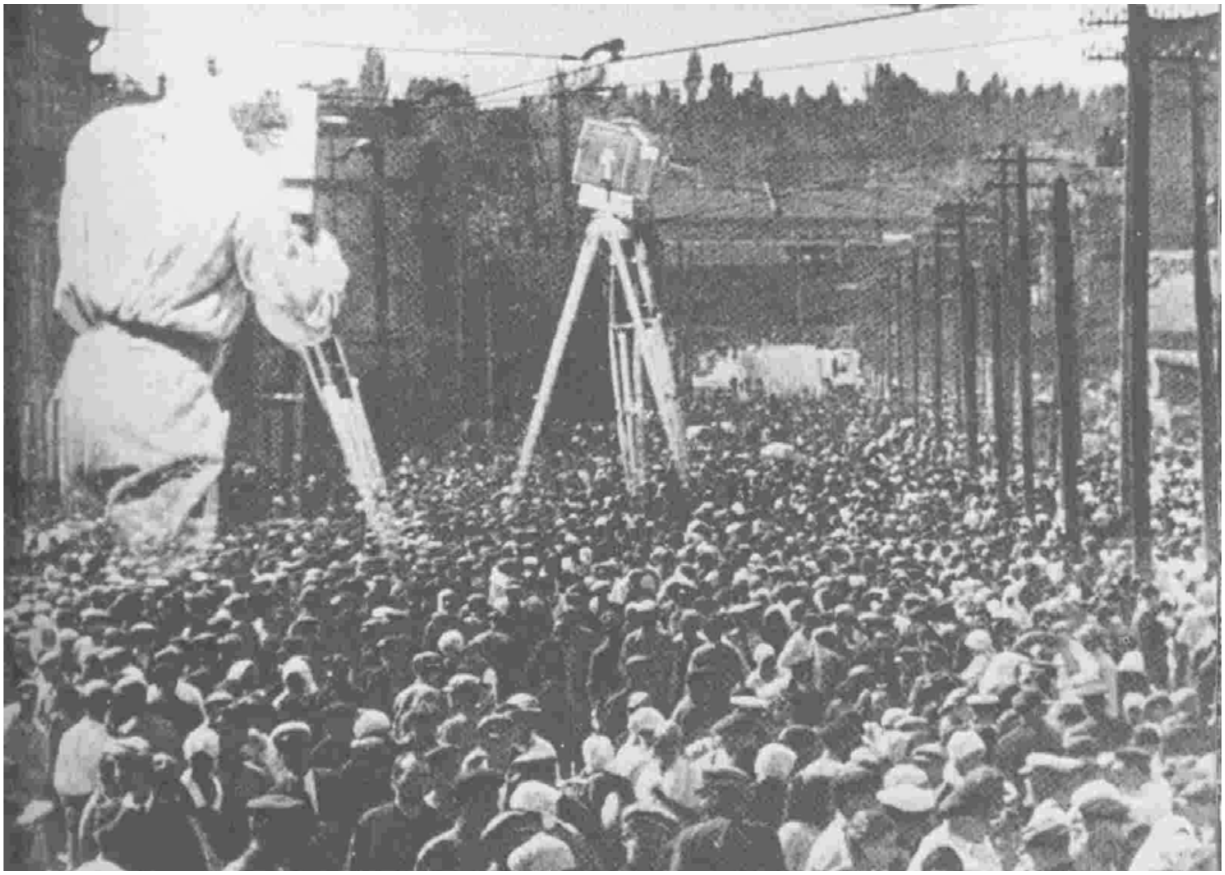
The sheer visual dynamism of this final sequence -- a cascade of ever more rapid, ever more forceful images interspersed with revolutionary titles in increasing crescendo -- had a powerful, radicalizing impact on audiences. Other strong images and episodes had the same effect; the Mongol about to be executed, heedlessly walking through a mud puddle which his "civilized" British executioner studiously avoids; Buddhist priests, Western businessmen, and British militarists related visually to establish their congruence as ruling class; a dignified Lama priest and a ridiculous British general's wife cross cut while dressing for a formal occasion. At a moment of revelation, the Mongol suddenly grabs hold of the British soldier's lapels. This is repeated several times in a very "modern" editing style. Altogether, the film is an object lesson in visual political cinema, glowing with revolutionary fervor and hatred for oppression.



THE END OF ST. PETERSBURG

(V.I. Pudovkin, USSR, 1927) (F)

The early Soviet cinema displays a strong sense of plastic and visual values, an emphasis on composition, and a feeling for form and abstraction within the requirements of radical ideology. Here capitalists crowd the stock exchange to watch their war profits climb.



THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA
(CHELOVEK A KINOAPPARATOM)
(Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929) (F)

The cinematographer as God, hovering over the multitude, seeing all. Significantly, however, he seems to be photographing a camera which stands by itself, as if even the cinematographer had become dispensable (anticipating what happens in the last reel). In any case, he is an illusory God, the "real" cameraman -- the one who photographed him -- remains invisible.

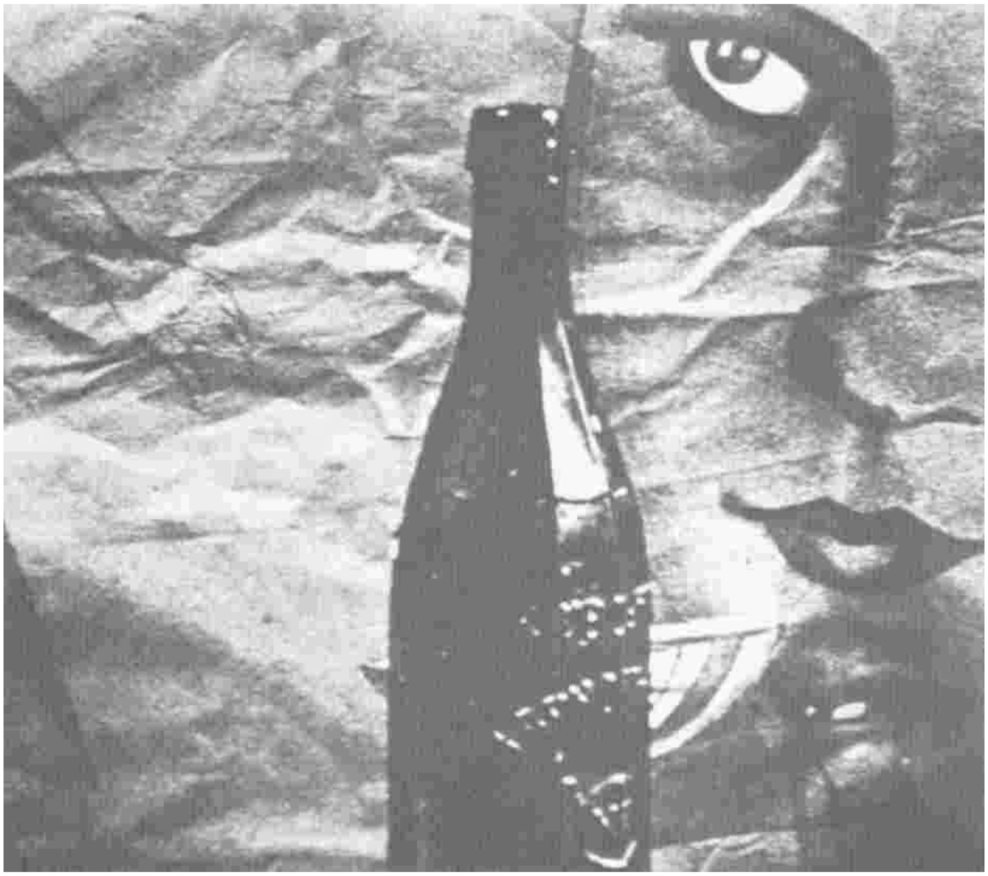
In retrospect, the avant-garde poet Dziga Vertov emerges as one of the most important influences in Soviet Cinema. Vertov moved rapidly from the production of propagandistic newsreels to a full radical aesthetic -- the Kino-Eye -- which found its culmination in his masterpiece, *The Man With The Movie Camera*. Beginning with his 1919 manifesto in LEF, the avant-garde journal edited by Mayakovsky, Vertov condemned the story film and proclaimed himself disinterested in psychological explorations of character: "Down with bourgeois fairytale plots and scenarios -- long live life as it is!" The emphasis was to be on the "unplayed" over the plotted film, on the substitution of documentation for narrative and *mise en scene*, on the destruction of the theatrical proscenium (invisibly present in so many Hollywood films) in favor of "the proscenium of life itself". This meant, as one Russian critic put it, the "detection" of plot within reality, instead of its "invention". Hence, the elimination of actors, lighting, make-up, studio, costumes,

and decor. It was with the "camera eye" -- the "armed eye of the director" -- that the essence of reality was to be captured. In a beautiful and very filmic statement, Vertov expressed this view succinctly:

> **"I am the camera eye. I -- am the mechanical eye.
> I -- am the machine which shows you the world as only
> I can see it. From today on, I liberate myself forever
> from human immobility. I am in perpetual motion.
> I approach and move away from objects -- I crawl
> beneath them -- I climb on top of them -- I am even
> with the head of the galloping horse -- I burst at top
> speed into crowds -- I run ahead of running soldiers --
> I throw myself on my back -- I rise together with airplanes --
> I fall and fly in unison with falling and ascending bodies. (1)**

This "liberation from human immobility" was to be achieved by means of the most meticulous montage -- an editing process subject to precise mathematical laws that determined the number of frames per shot, their duration and their order.

***The Man With The Movie Camera* proved to be a veritable object lesson of Vertov's theories. Though met at first with disregard, hostility, or bewilderment, the film has emerged as one of the most profound classics of the Soviet era. Its protagonist is the camera; its assistant, the cameraman; its subject, film. It starts and ends with the camera eye. The visual pretext is a vivid panorama of one day in the life of a city and, simultaneously, the progression of life from birth to death. It is a film by a man drunk with the camera, filled with the most exuberant pleasure in visuals "as such", a film that shows the voluptuousness of life, the rush and vitality of a city, the faces and preoccupations of its anonymous inhabitants. A true avant-garde work, it offers a brilliant compendium of filmic possibilities, original devices and visual associations.**



THE MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA
(CHELOVEK A KINOAPPARATOM)
(Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929) (F)

The origins of Godard. Vertov's obsessive delight in mysterious visuals counterposes poster and bottle, their size and compositional unity (shape of bottle conforming to that of woman's cheek) transforming them into huge reaffirmations of unknown mysteries.

Though its content can hardly be considered radical, it is its form that stamps this as one of the most subversive films of the Soviet classic era. For in scene after scene, and antedating the structuralist films of our day by almost half a century, it intentionally and in the most calculated manner reveals its artificiality and "calls attention" to its synthetic, man-made quality. In a constant toying with reality as against illusion, it persistently destroys the spectator's identification with itself by the introduction of a roving cinematographer into the action, by the device of a film within a film, by the sudden freezing, slowing or acceleration of movement, the use of split-screens, super-impositions, and reverse action. The result, as Annette Michaelson puts it, is an attack on the illusion of art and a constant recall of the spectator to himself so as to disturb his equilibrium and to subvert him on deeper levels.

The manner in which Vertov questions the most immediately powerful and sacred aspect of cinematic experience, disrupting systematically the process of identification and participation, generates at each moment of the film's

experience, a crisis of belief. (2)

The most significant sequence involves the sudden introduction into the film's action of an editing room in which strips of film -- their images necessarily motionless -- are held out to us by the editor: they also, however, immediately precede, follow, or duplicate the real film's live action, thus calling attention to the artificiality of the cinematic experience itself. The editor holds a strip of four or five film frames, with a child's face, sideways or even upside-down; next, and entirely unexpectedly, the entire screen is filled with these very frames, in motion. This juxtaposition of frozen images on actual, spectator-seen celluloid strips ("film") with moving images filling the frame ("life") is extremely subversive, particularly since the device is used repeatedly and in an unpredictable manner. Far from being an academic exercise, this juxtaposition of frozen and live images -- syncopated into a voluptuous rhythm -- represents the core of Vertov's deadly serious attack on our conciousness.

A similar philosophical point is made in the famed sequence of a cameraman in a moving car, photographing a group of women riding alongside him in a carriage. We continue seeing these images and accept them as representations of the process of filming -- until, in a disturbing instant, we realize that "of course" the "cameraman" is but an actor, in turn photographed by the real and invisible cinematographer. Thus, in a cosmic and subversive pun, "the man with the movie camera", though ubiquitous in the film and almost continuously present as an actor, is in reality invisible; just as the film strips we "saw" in the editing room sequence were themselves being photographed. Thus, in "revealing" the so-called "truth", about the people in the carriage (their being photographed), Vertov fools us. The presumed abolition of illusion (the presence of a photographed cameraman within the action of the sequence) in itself leads to a new illusion.

This repeated and intricate "breaking" of illusions represents Vertov's search for truth, as he both creates and continually annihilates illusionary reality before our startled eyes. It can be found as well in his utilization of unorthodox dissolves (the lovely sequence of a woman's slow opening of window shutters, photographed in a rapid series of superimpositions, each slightly different), in his use of linkage (by visual association and analogy), and of cross-cutting of different actions in mounting rhythm (one occuring at such dizzying speed that the successive frames become simultaneously visible as subliminal flashes, creating superimpositions that do not exist in reality). Where most filmmakers remove us from ourselves in their effort to create a new reality and force us into a suspension of disbelief.

When *The Man With The Movie Camera* was first shown in 1929, Stalinism had consolidated its power and commandeered the arts to its own purposes. Ironically, however, the subversive and anti-totalitarian implications of avant-garde aestheticism manifest in this film -- its questioning of reality, its call for the liquidation of illusionism -- were not evident to the regime.

OCTOBER

(Sergei M. Eisenstein, USSR, 1927) (F)

The metaphysical aestheticism of Eisenstein -- rightly condemned by the Stalinists as opposed to their simplistic "socialist realism" -- seen in three mysterious, strongly Kafkaesque shots

from his "official" film about the 1917 Revolution.

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THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

AESTHETIC REBELS AND REBELLIOUS CLOWNS

The three most subversive aesthetic tendencies of our century -- surrealism, expressionism, and dada -- are anchored in the reality of a civilization in decline. They are gestures of defiance against the chaos which is organized society. The expressionist Max Beckmann, whose triptychs of torture and death prefigured Buchenwald, Stalin's camps, and Vietnam, wrote in 1919:

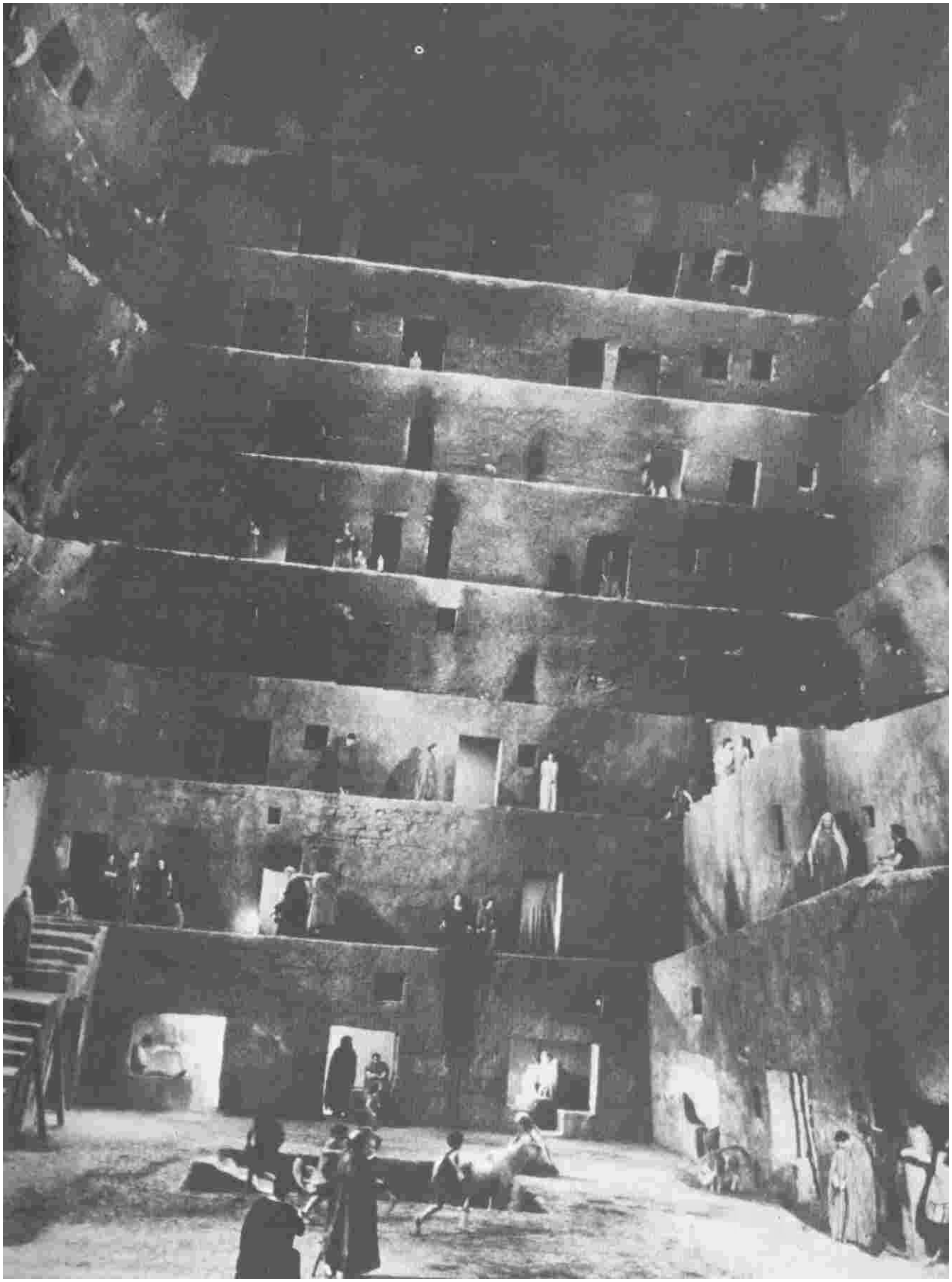
> **Just now, even more than before the war, I feel the need to be in the cities, among my fellowmen -- this is where our place is. We must take part in the whole misery that is to come. We must surrender our hearts and our nerves to the dreadful screams**

of pain of the poor, disillusioned people. (1)

"We must take part in the whole misery that is to come"; nothing can more movingly express the social commitment of the artist, his understanding of a brutal present and worse future. For the first time the stability of the imperial and capitalist system was being called into question. The ravages of war and depression, the corruption of values, the mood of defeatism and alienation -- these constituted the matrix within which the new arts germinated.

They were nourished by the liberating poisons coming from the sciences and philosophy. Reason and logic, bright hopes of a previous generation of intellectuals and artists, were found to be wanting or else required to destroy previous "truths". Time was ripe for the subversions of Einstein and Freud.

Whatever their differences, surrealism, expressionism, and dada were united in their determination to declare war on a corrupt society and its putrefied values, to dethrone academic art. Opening themselves to subjectivism and the unconcious they would help transform the world by using art as a tool of revolution.



SATYRICON

(Federico Fellini, Italy, 1969) (F)

The return to expressionist decor in the guise of realist portrayal; crooked, converging lines, a feeling of impending implosion, the play of selective light and shadow, the submersion of the human element within threatening architecture. Instead of

painting the set as in *Caligari*, the filmmaker
had the financial resources to build it. SC

EXPRESSIONISM: THE CINEMA OF UNREST

Eschewing the delicate attempts of the impressionists to capture color nuances or the pleasures of petty-bourgeois life, expressionism feeds on dissonance, excess, violent emotion, the secret worm gnawing at the vitals of society. In the works of Munch, Kirchner, Kaiser, Marc, Klee, and Kandinsky, "objectivity" and perfection of form are sacrificed to intensity and shock. The artist, no longer a contemplative bystander, becomes an active participant:

> The artist does not see -- he looks;
> he does not describe -- he experiences;
> he does not reproduce -- he creates;
> he does not take -- he searches;
> Today there no longer exist chains of data such as factories, houses, illness, whores, screams, and hunger; today we merely have them in visionary form. The data has significance only insofar as the artist -- groping beyond it -- finds what there is underneath. (2)

Beckmann, too, was driven by the same impulse:

> What I want to show in my work is the idea which hides behind so-called reality. I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible.

This ineffable, poignant straining towards the secret beyond appearance is common to the surrealists as well. For the expressionists, however, the "bridge" was to be formed by the distortion and exaggeration of color and mass, character and decor, stylized into making the normal artificial.

The expressionist stance is anti-romanticist. Its colors are shrill, false and vulgar. Its angles and perspectives are distorted. The objects it portrays are of abnormal shape or proportions. The dynamism resulting from exposure to such psychological insults and shocks is meant to wrench the spectator from the conventional and open him to the radical new.

Obliqueness is particularly important. To Rudolf Arnheim, it is "probably the most elementary and effective means of obtaining directed tension, perceived spontaneously as a deviation from the basic spatial framework of the vertical and the horizontal. This involves a tension between the norm position and that of the deviating object, the latter appearing as striving toward rest, being attracted by the framework, pulling away from the framework, or being pushed away by it". (3) This deviation can involve both location and shape.

The emphasis on extremity and shock unites expressionism, surrealism, and dada. Theirs was an activist, transforming, subversive art, designed to eradicate the reactionary values of an establishment that had proven its bankruptcy.

CLICK HERE FOR FILM DESCRIPTIONS:
EXPRESSIONISM: THE CINEMA OF UNREST

BIRDS, ORPHANS, AND FOOLS
(Juro Jakubisco, France, 1971) (F)
Staircases that perhaps lead nowhere; wardrobes without backs; a clown that may be real; and a doomed attempt to live a life of freedom in a world of insanity and war. A message in a bottle from a Czech director temporarily in France.

SURREALISM: THE CINEMA OF SHOCK

Surrealism, the most clearly political of the three tendencies, was more an instrument of cognition than an aesthetic movement. In fact, its aim was to destroy aestheticism. It meant to subvert the *status quo*

of patriotism, church, state, family, national honor, and bourgeois ideals. It rebelled against conformism and the false rationalism of bourgeois art and society, attacked reassurance. Its aim: to destroy all censors and to liberate man's libidinal, anarchist, and "marvelous" impulses from all restraint.

Most important, surrealism postulated a return to the irrational and to the magic of dreams as a means of revelation and personal (hence social) liberation. Drawing on Dostoevski, Poe, and Baudelaire, the symbolist-radicals Mallarme, Rimbaud, and the anarchist Apollinaire, the surrealists proudly proclaimed poetry (the subconcious) the supreme weapon of knowledge and conquest. Rationalism and realism were insufficient precisely because they omitted instinct and the subconcious. Wallace Fowlie has defined the realist as one who tells us what he sees of the world, the philosopher, what he thinks of it, the poet, what he knows. (4) Poetic knowledge is "truer" than rational knowledge: the poet-artist is the seer, possessing magic qualities which neither he nor the spectator fully grasp. ("For the first time in history," said Norman Mailer in *A Fire on the Moon*, referring to the American moon shot, "a massive bureaucracy had committed itself to a surrealist adventure, which is to say that the meaning of the proposed act was palpable to everyone, yet nobody could explain its logic.")

Art here is viewed as a magical incantation. Its creations and effects are both miraculous. Socrates described the poet as "a light and winged and whole thing; there is no invention in him, until he has been inspired and is out of his senses and the mind is no longer in him." To become a seer, the artist must give his imagination free reign by following the dictates of his subconcious and turning himself into an "echo". (5) "Man is not just the reasoner, but also the sleeper." (6) For to work intuitively, without logic, means to return to sleep and dream.

In elevating the subconcious to the central role, art returns to its fundamental mystery:

> **The profoundest works of art are those related to the most hidden intentions. The deeper the artist plunges himself through introspection, the further he moves away from the assurances of facts, the nearer he will approach the ambiguity of dreams ... What we want is the enigma, not the truth ... not clarity, but ambiguity rules art, and surrealism is the triumph of ambiguity ... a cult of the enigmatic adapted to a culture that has outgrown the rituals and sacraments of official religions, heresies, and metaphysical acts. (8)**

It is here that Freud most strongly influenced the surrealists. Hence their emphasis on stream-of-conciousness, hallucinatory states, "automatic writing", and absurd games; their opposition to plotted narrative. Only the realm beyond logic was held to reveal truth and resolve the false contradiction of dream and waking life into the higher reality of

surrealism. Said Andre Breton in the first surrealist manifesto in 1924:

> Surrealism is pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupathions. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of associations heretofore neglected; in the omnipotence of the dream and in the disinterested play of thought. (9)

These "irrational" associations constitute the primary surrealist weapon, the use of "shock". This is attained by distortion of reality or the disjunction of objects from their usual context, resulting in their transformation into "surrealist objects". George Amberg states, in an unpublished paper, that the mechanism of intentional shock causes a powerful, instant tension discharge on the part of the spectator which is beneficial (pleasurable) rather than traumatic, its aesthetic pleasure inverse to its strength.

Examples of the surrealist object are Dali's melting watches (a desecration of our holiest symbol of truth and objectivity, this picture could not have been painted before Freud and Einstein); Max Ernst's collages of old engravings and incongruous pictorial elements; Magritte's picture of a pipe with a byline reading: "This is not a pipe." Illustrative of the surrealist sensibility are Lautreamont's definition of beauty as "the classic meeting on a dissecting tableof a sewing machine and an umbrella" or Di Chirico's realization that even such ordinary transpositions as furniture on a pavement during moving (or the frightening displacement of familiar objects following a burglary) acquire an uncanny new meaning.

This detaching of objects from their usual surroundings (chains), Fowlie maintains, can be viewed as a gesture of freedom from the rules of society, family, and state and represents the "limitless possibility" of salvation through dream, love, and desire. (10) Far from this salvation having taken place, perhaps the most "shocking" aspect of surrealism is that its imaginary nightmares and monstrous projections of the unthinkable have in our day become realities.

CLICK HERE FOR FILM DESCRIPTIONS:
SURREALISM: THE CINEMA OF SHOCK

BIG BUSINESS

(J.W. Horne, USA, 1924)

Brilliiant farce propels two ineffectual Christmas tree salesmen into a prolonged bout of savage destruction directed against a customer who refuses to buy. Mutual insults, tie snipping, and small violence escalate from controlled disturbance to surrealist cataclysm, in which the American Home is leveled once and for all.

DADA AND POP: ANTI-ART?

The renewed emphasis on objects and their juxtaposition also animated the dadaists. Much later is was to influence the present-day offspring of expressionism, surrealism, and dada -- the pop artists. In their total rejection of art, the dadaists (destined to become "artists" in turn) desecreted logic and objectivity. They turned their attention to object and the micro- elements of reality the more thoroughly to destroy the macro-structure. "Dada wished to replace the logical nonsense of the men of today with an illogical nonsense." (11) Everything was permissible as regards materials, subject matter, and placement. The more banal and everyday the object, the better it served its purpose. Duchamp turned a urinal into a work of art simply by isolating it from its usual environment and function. Objects, states Alan Solomon, were no longer neutral but ambiguous and arbitrary, their "meaning" dependent on the artist. There are correlations between Schwitters' changing found objects into

art and Rauschenberg's cabled reply to a request to do a portrait of Iris Clert: "This telegram is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so"; (12) or Edward Ruscha's book of photographs, *Real Estate Opportunities in and around Los Angeles*, merely showing views of undeveloped lots. In a similar vein are Jasper Johns' hand-painted replicas of Ballantine Ale cans and Harvey Stromberg's "permanent" Museum of Modern Art Exhibition of his "works" -- photographic scale-reproductions of Museum keyholes, light switches, and wall cracks, pasted on the museum walls and doors by the artist. When coke bottles, hot dogs, and photos of parking lots become art, objects once again become magical, serving as icons to make us view reality more closely and to question it. This "tearing" of the illusionist surface of reality and of its customary acceptance as truthful and eternal, is what constitutes the subversion of Warhol or Tzara.

The separation of object from environment can also be achieved by a change of proportions between them or by the suppression of background. Anticipating Warhol and minimal art, this was understood by Leger:

> **To isolate the object or the fragment of an object and to present it on the screen in close-ups of the largest possible scale gives it a personality it never had before and in this way it can become a vehicle of entirely new lyric and plastic power. (11)**

Charles Reich points out that pop artists, by presenting neon signs, juke boxes, and other icons of a sterile consumer society in an apparently neutral yet isolating manner, transcend these objects by creative use, thereby regaining a measure of power over their environment. (14)

Similarly to surrealism, dada also stresses the significance of chance and accident, delighting in their subversive unpredictability. Dada accepts neither stricture nor dogma, mixes style and materials, and contradicts and attacks itself. The very concept of "original" art is questioned by Warhol and Duchamp; art has become reproduceable and expendable.

The radical aspects of dada and pop art have been integrated into a style of unconventional political action by segments of the international New Left (particularly the American Yippies and the student movement). This may involve introducing flowers into a situation of state violence, political street theatre to disrupt opponents' meetings, the distribution of dollar bills to New York stock exchange brokers, intentional disrespect for the flag and other patriotic symbols, or exhortations to punch IBM-cards erratically to disrupt computer billing. Such actions return us to surrealist juxtaposition of related objects and nose-thumbing dadaist disregard of their ordinary use.

It is the very artificiality of the film medium -- its inevitable "de-formation" of reality, implicit anarchist freedom from all logical restraint, and inherent subjectivity -- that renders it an eminently suitable tool for these artists.

As the surrealist critic-filmmaker Jacques Brunius maintained, in contrast to the Kracauer-school of film-theory, "the cinema is the least realistic art." (13) It can distort shapes, colors, life; it can imitate dreams and free associations by transformations of time and space; it can combine objects and background (or have them collide) in the most "objectionable" concatenations; it can destroy space, already rendered suspect by the surrealists, in a fraction of a second; it is able to portray the subconcious or reveal the "automatic" artistic activity of the filmmaker. The shocking introduction of new objects into the frame, the explosive juxtaposition of conflicting images by means of editing, the startling ability of the medium to create even "impossible" new realities by superimposition, masks and other technical devices, pointed to film as a perfect medium for humanist provocation.

CLICK HERE FOR FILM DESCRIPTIONS:
DADA AND POP: ANTI ART?

TO OUR CHIEF
AND HIS BRIDE

UNIDENTIFIABLE KEYSTONE FILM

Circa 1915

The surrealist exuberance of Mack Sennett's universe -- its cataclysms of destruction, its refutation of common sense and logic -- involves frontal attacks on the bourgeois notion of a stable, orderly universe. No institution is safe, and every point

is made visually in cascading, brilliantly-timed sight gags.

THE COMIC TRADITION

These cinematic devices led surrealism, dadaists, and, in a different manner, expressionists, quickly to realize the subversive potential of film comedy.

Sennett, Fields, the Marx Brothers, Langdon, Keaton, and Chaplin make a frontal attack, with exuberant madness and in differing styles, on the beloved bourgeois notion of a stable, orderly universe in which appearance equates reality, justice and law prevail, the meek are accomodated, and ladies are safely married. The great film comedians in their endless cataclysms of visual gags -- so beautifully wedded to cinema in which the image was supreme -- befoul this myth in the most hilarious and offensive manner, supporting it in paroxysms of seditious defloration. Any symbol of the ruling class is subject to immediate attack. The rich and the powerful, anyone in uniform -- judges, priests, society ladies, policemen, emperors, and presidents -- are all stripped of their power emblems and pretensions in systematic, large-scale assaults or insidious guerilla attacks.

The taboo of the state and its institutions, of organized religion and bourgeois respectability is subverted by sight-gags, pie-throwing, pratfalls, and savage satire: not even fire departments or womanhood are exempt as the demystification of society is completed.

And it is once again the cinema that is most capable of wreaking this metaphysical, seditious havoc; for action can be speeded up for comic effect; time and space can be scrambled; impossible accidents created most realistically; editing can provide an incessant tempo of successively heightened sight gags; wordless actions involving the basic symbols of reality assume the character of hilarious nightmares; jump-cuts or stop-motion animation irreverently combine what is never combined in good society. Here the inherent anarchism of cinema (so beloved by the surrealists) finds its true and perhaps ultimate expression. An attack on a technology gone wild, a cynicism regarding human motives, a tearing off of all veils, a total permissiveness that allows revenge against power and cant, characterize this procession of masterpieces, one of America's significant contributions to the international subversive cinema.

Robert Desnos, brilliant surrealist poet and ideologue killed by the Nazis, in a book significantly entitled *Mack Sennett, Liberator of Cinema*, emphasizes the essential:

> **We well know the madness presiding over his scripts. It is the madness of fairy tale and of those dreamers whom the world holds in contempt and to whom the world owes what is delightful in life. (16)**

The anarchists' revolt extends to all the symbols of bourgeois good life, everything that is "holy". Mothers are mercilessly attacked, baby carriages overturned, children despised, sentimental love satirized, last-minute rescues and happy endings made fun of, the sanctity of home and family besmirched; nothing is exempt from their laughter.

The German historians Enno Patalas and Ulrich Gregor correctly point to the inversion by Sennett of Griffith's basic thematic materials. Sennett had worked with Griffith and referred to this apprenticeship as his "university". He used Griffith's editing methods and sentimental plots, however, not for realism and epic narrative, but to explode the illusion of reality and narrative continuity and he specifically satirized the master's style and plots in a number of films. (17) Chaplin, the most politically concious of the comedians, combined pathos and an essentially tragic view of life with the most sublime visual imagination and physical dexterity. A similar pathos permeates both Keaton and Langdon, a stoic pessimism (yet stubborn resistance) to objects as well as institutions that forces us to laugh and simultaneously cry in painful self-realization. At the height of his power, it was Ionesco who best sensed the deeper significance of this movement:

> **I have never been able to understand the difference that is made between the comic and the tragic. As the comic is the intuition of the absurd, it seems to me more conducive to despair than the tragic. The comic offers no way out. I say "conducive to despair", but in reality it is beyond despair or hope ... Humor makes us conscious with a free lucidity of the tragic or desultory condition of man ... Laughter alone does not respect any taboo; the comic alone is capable of giving us the strength to bear the tragedy of existence. (18)**

In these films, relativity and ambiguity -- hallmarks of the modern sensibility -- reign supreme. No one is what he seems, friend turns into foe, buildings collapse, innocent episodes turn into catastrophes involving mass destruction; nothing is firm or eternal. The universe is presented as an alien, hostile place, where only a few, far-flung pockets of love exist to provide temporary relief from loneliness and alienation. Rare humanizing episodes can only be found in Chaplin or the romantic entanglements (however shallow) of Langdon or Keaton. Love is never directed towards the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy or W.C. Fields. Harpo, the insane, joyful satyr and the ineffectual Stan Laurel only project a leering, anarchic sexuality.

The worldwide success and international acceptance of these masterpieces is not only a tribute to their art and the power of their images, but even more a recognition of the universality of the injustice and cant which they opposed with diabolical laughter; it is precisely this that endeared

them to the aesthetic rebels of the first half of our century.

CLICK HERE FOR FILM DESCRIPTIONS:
THE COMIC TRADITION

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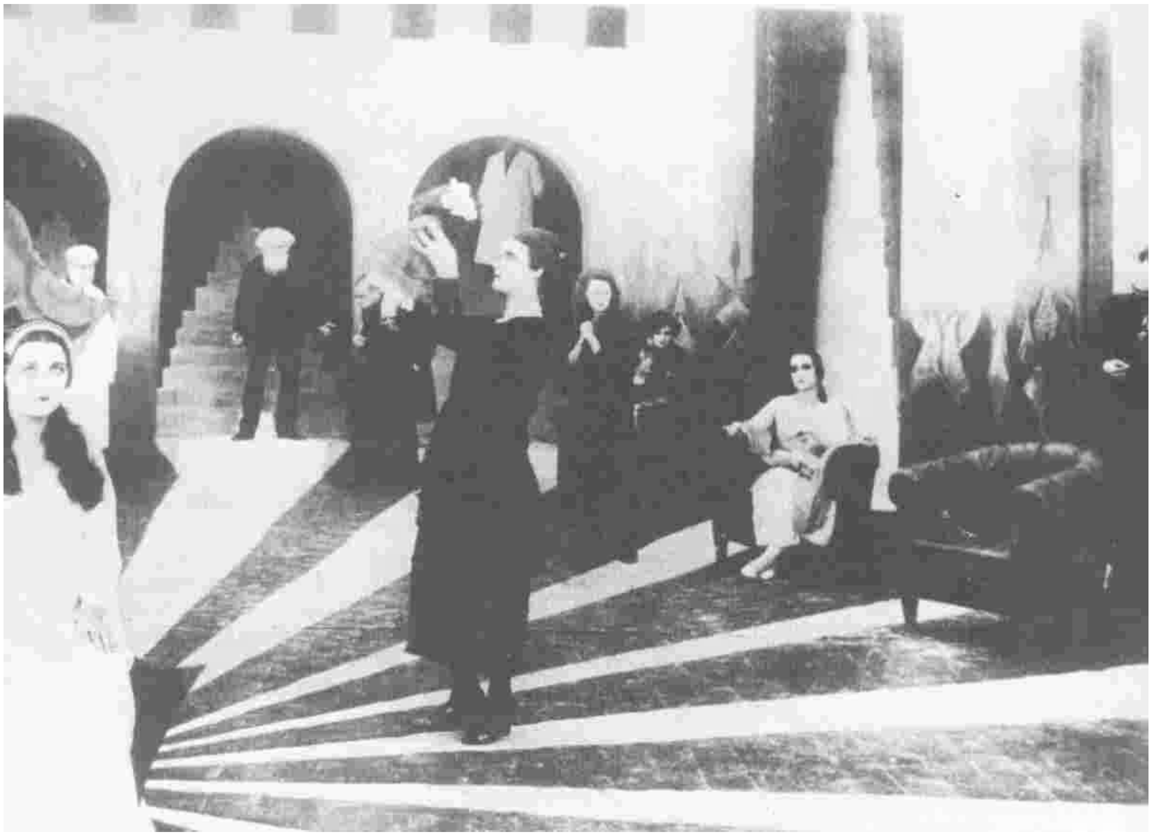
THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

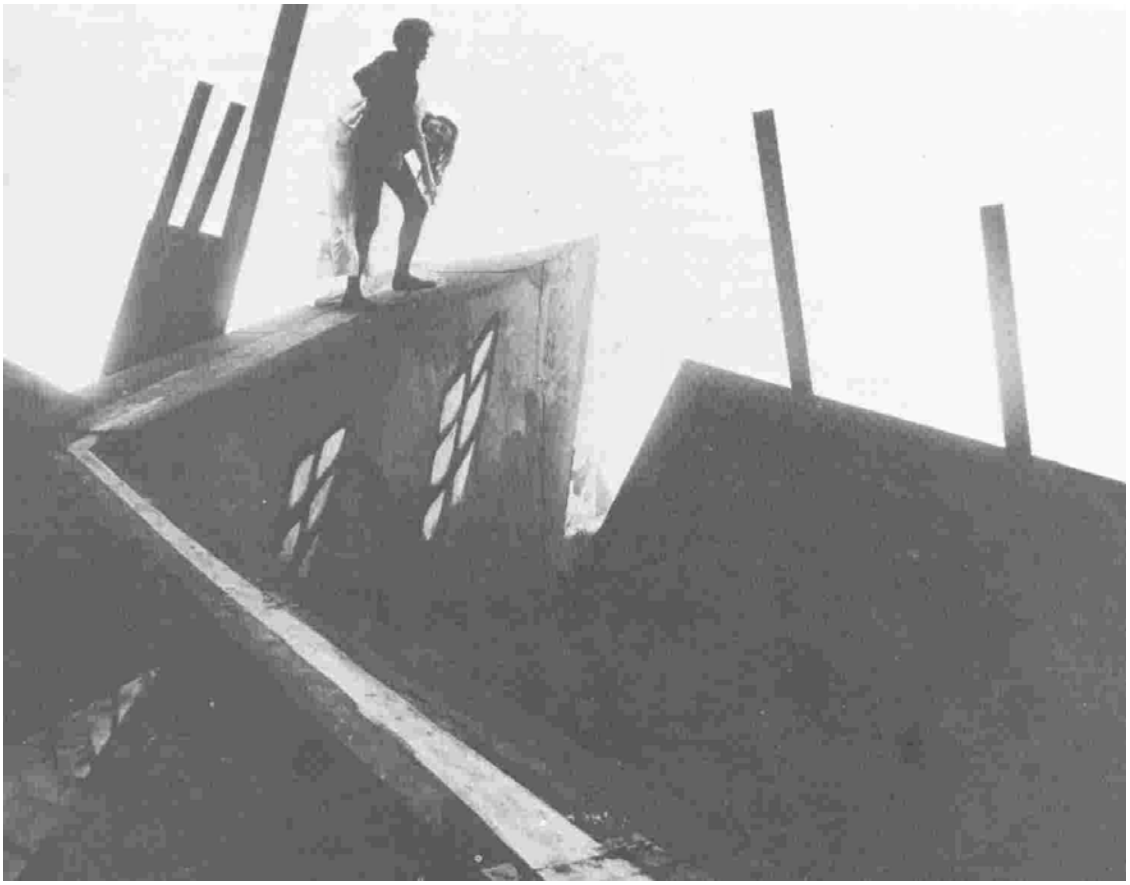
FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART



THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI
(DAS KABINETT DES DR. CALIGARI)
(Robert Wiene, Germany, 1919) (F)
The insane asylum -- but is it? In a very modern twist, the lines between sane and insane shift while reality and rationalism are called into question. The concentric ray pattern, converging upon the mad heroine, creates strong visual disturbance, reinforced by opposing geometric shapes in the background.

EXPRESSIONISM: THE CINEMA OF UNREST

FILMS



THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI (DAS KABINETT DES DR. CALIGARI)

(Robert Wiene, Germany, 1919) (F)

The decor as integral part of the expressionist statement. Proudly artificial, it calls attention to itself by boldness and exaggeration. Not a single straight line is to be seen; instead, both actors and sets seem to collapse upon each other in a reflection of chaos and dread, as the murderous somnambulist abducts the girl.

This extraordinary work -- in terms of impact, one of the most important films ever made -- is a metaphysical construct disguised as a melodramatic thriller. Apparently the story of a mad magician who hypnotizes a somnambulist into committing murder, it is recounted by the protagonist in a setting revealed only at the end as part of an insane asylum, in which protagonist and actors are inmates, while the mad magician is actually their benevolent psychiatrist.

Suffused with atavistic, nameless terror, the film evokes and exploits unfocused, primitive anxieties in the spectator. In the context of the early twenties its aesthetic daring and originality are extreme; it

creates its own magic universe, stressing darkness and night as the arena of human dread and anxiety. The decor and scenery -- by well-known expressionist painters -- are totally integrated, subjective components of the action without which the film could not exist; they are riddled with emotion and entirely artificial (often merely painted on) and full of distorted perspectives and extreme dislocations. Tottering streets, warped buildings and ceilings, walls that tend to fall toward each other, even abstract patterns serve to emphasize claustrophobia and impending chaos. The artificial, hand-drawn shadows (antidating *Last Year in Marienbad*) fall in disregard of natural laws, increasing distortion and contrast; fighting is selective, melodramatic, arbitrary; acting -- adapted to the metaphysical concept of the work -- stylized and robot-like,as if the false curves and "movements" of the decor were being duplicated by the protagonists. Their faces distorted into mask-like visages by exaggerated makeup, they (and their stilted dialogue conveyed in inter-titles) convey no human dimensions.

The film is sparse and works on the level of hints and intense, distinct moments. Filmically, it abjures the pyrotechnics of the avant-garde; the camera is largely immobile (except for a few tracking shots),in middle distance; there is barely any editing; camera angles are conventional. The only concession to film technique is the use of a circular or diamond-shaped iris device at start and end of sequences to act as metaphors of a break between outer and inner world and poetically to slow the action in its measured revelation (or rendering invisible) of a hallucinatory universe.

***Caligari* is ideologically a most modern film. We are in a world of chaos, terror, and non-understanding. Existential coldness envelops it, implying the need for revolt, the probability of failure, the dilemma of freedom subordinated to fate, the realization (in 1919!) of something frightful in our midst. The world itself is seen as insane asylum and, with Laing, we are never sure who are the inmates and who are the physicians.**

The final irony of the film is that its "reality" is ultimately revealed as simply a madman's fantasy. The fact that we have been duped is more unsettling, hence more subversive, than would have been the originally envisioned ending, in which the story would have been "true" -- with Caligari mad and the hero sane. Instead, just as in *The Man With The Movie Camera* and so many of the most modern films, we confusedly encounter conflicting levels of reality. As one is revealed as spurious, we enter a second, perhaps equally dubious level. The subversion of our conscious, the dislocation of our sense of reality, is therefore tw0-fold: first, the false revelation of the madman Caligari as a fraudulent psychiatrist; and then, in a complete reversal, his reinstatement as benevolent doctor, with hero unmasked as madman in turn. The result is that at the end there remains an unsettling suspicion -- fed by no tangible clues except our own now continuous sense of distrust -- that this may not be "the truth" either.

THE CAT AND THE CANARY

(Paul Leni, USA, 1927) (F)

This extraordinary prototype of the horror film progresses to its climax in a suitably decaying manor. It utilizes all devices of expressionism to induce, as Matthews (1) puts it, a salutary state of anxiety through terror: dark rooms and hallways, heavy shadows, secret compartments, invisible enemies, billowing drapes, a constantly moving camera. The set and decor are integral parts of a story and, more importantly, a mood that captures us by remaining shadowy and unspecified.

(1) J.H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 1971

THE CREMATOR

(Juraj Herz, Czechoslavakia, 1968) (F)

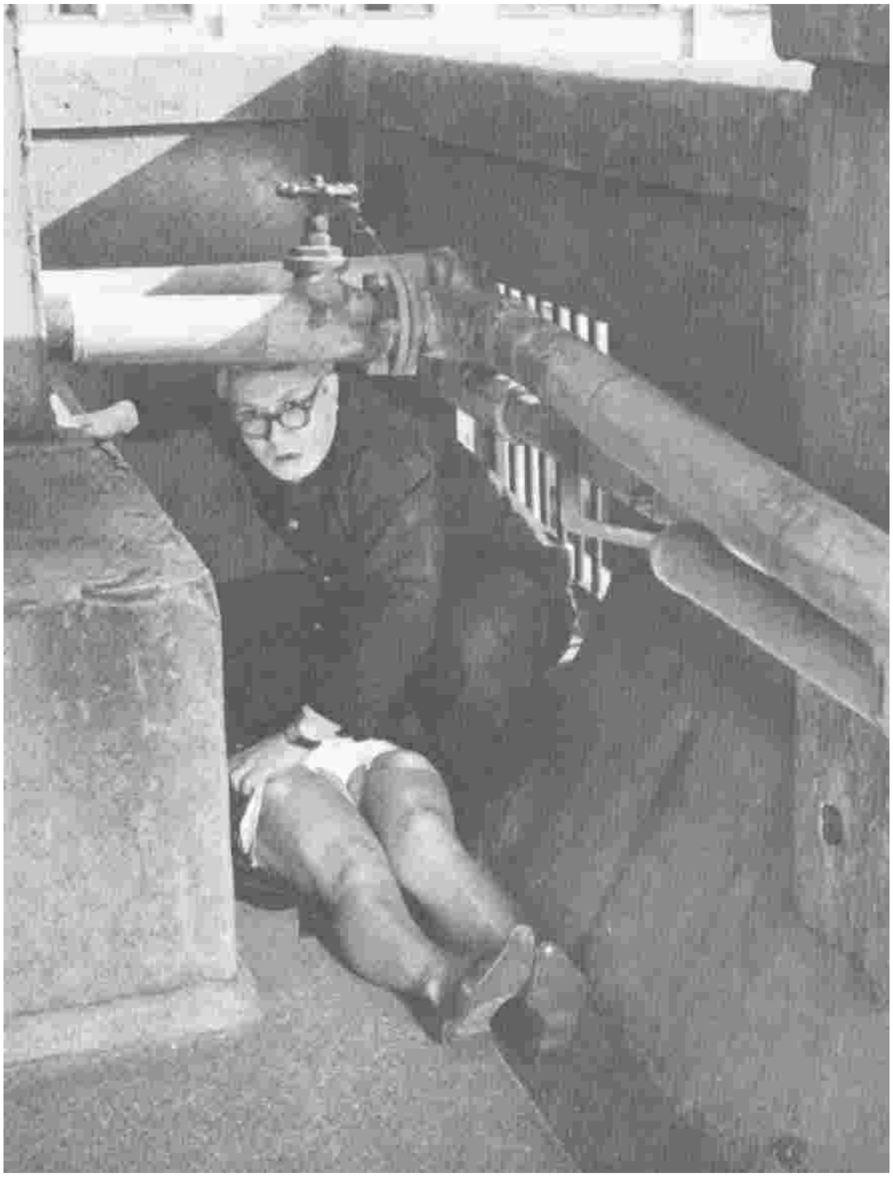
A provocative attempt to penetrate the origins of sado-sexual Nazi mentality is made in this oppressive, strongly expressionist film about an inhibited petty-bourgeois family-man whose work with corpses at the local crematorium -- "to free them for the after-life" -- gains unexpected proportions during the Nazi occupation. His meek wife agrees to let herself be hanged by him, his son is murdered and added to someone else's coffin, and his final appointment as head of an extermination camp -- once again to dispatch people to freedom -- appears as logical denouement to a bizarre, powerful story. Editing and camerawork is strongly influenced by the new cinema in the West. Equally surprising for the puritanical East is its clear, yet entirely "hidden" portrayal of fellatio, with the girl under a table and the man sitting behind it; at the end, she emerges, wiping her mouth.

DEATH BY HANGING (KOSHIKEI)

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1968) (F)

The Establishment and its Victim. Opposed to caputal punishment, the filmmaker meticulously places rope and victim in the center; the execution fails and the victim must be executed a second time.

A bizarre and alien masterpiece by an indefatigable experimentor, based on a true story of a Korean unjustlyaccused of murder and rape and subsequently executed. This is a brilliantly achieved expressionist drama, during which the condemned man ironically must be executed twice and the police, re-enacting his crime to convince him of his guilt, are carried away by their role-playing into committing a second rape and murder. It is an extraordinary study of personal identity and social guilt, of reality and illusion, of the law's need for crime to exist and of capital punishment as the supreme crime. The work, while reminiscent of Commedia dell'Arte and of Brecht, emerges as possibly the most genuinely Japanese work to be seen in the West.



DEATH BY HANGING
(KOSHIKEI)

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1968) (F)

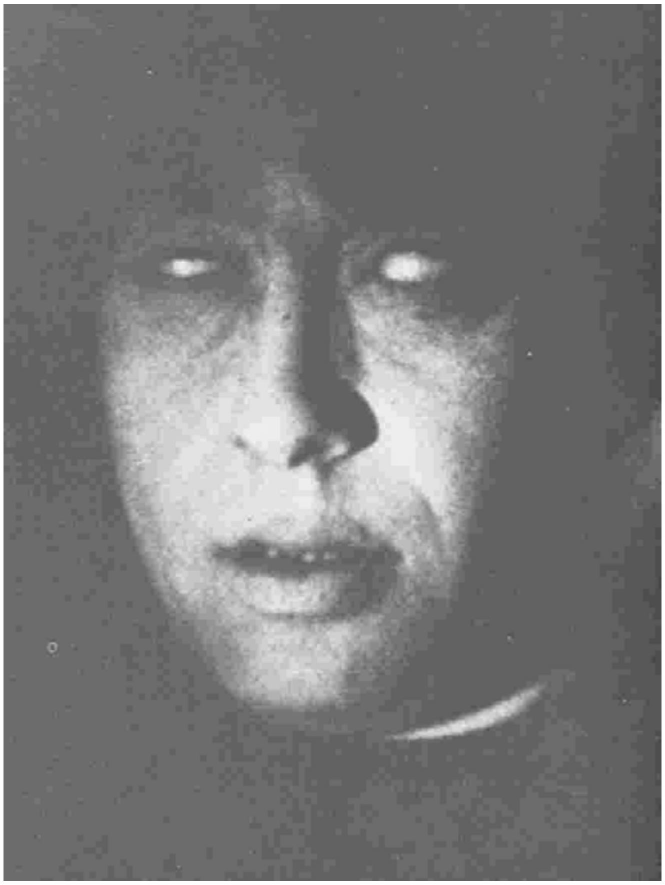
In a Brechtian sequence, the police, attempting to convince the condemned man of his guilt, re-enact his crime with such gusto that they actually commit it; subversive proof that law needs crime to exist. The policeman, exhibiting the fear of the criminal caught in the act, already seems incarcerated by the composition, but is unable to remove his incriminating hand from the suddenly desired object. The positioning of the woman's body is visually provocative.

CAPRICCI

(Carmelo Bene, Italy, 1969) (F)

The wretched, gasping attempts by this near-corpse to make love to the nubile young woman exemplify the expressionist, black humor and melodrama of an exorbitant work.

Founder of one of Italy's most famous experimental theatres, poet, actor, author, playwrite, and leading avant-gardist. Carmelo Bene is an unknown genius of contemporary cinema. This is one of his masterpieces. Bene's films are visual, lyrical and auditory cataclysms, whose lava-like outpourings are of unequalled hallucinatory perversity. Their visual density and creative exuberance defy description. *Capricci* -- melodramatic, wildly expressionist, and opaque -- includes a bloody, endless fight between two men brandishing hammer and sickle, poisoned Christ paintings that kill the beholder, impotent sex by a lecherous old man coughing his lungs out over a tantalyzingly nude woman, killings, car crashes, explosions, and raging fires, all accompanied by operatic arias, constantly moving cameras, and violent montage. Vulgar black humor, eroticism, and anarchic action mingle in this swirl of color and incessant motion -- a *tour de force* of expressionist filmmaking.



OUR LADY OF THE TURKS (NOSTRA SIGNORA DEI TURCHI)

(Carmelo Bene, Italy, 1969) (F)

The filmmaker himself as expressionist hero; selective lighting, interplay of whiteness and shadow, frightening, irregular positioning of eyes and pupils create an uncanny ambience.

With *Capricci*, this is the most hallucinatory and original masterpiece yet created by Bene; an explosion of neo-expressionism (with surrealist overtones) unequalled on the contemporary screen. The inspired, exasperating madness of this possessed moralist carries him beyond rage into black humor and grotesque burlesque, aimed at the deadweight of a reactionary cultural matrix. This appears here as the heritage of sumptous, crumbling churches, miraculous Madonnas, and melodramatic operas, the excesses of the Baroque in art and life-elements of an Italy from which Bene wishes to free himself.

Moravia refers to Bene's work as "desecration by dissociation, pushed beyond the point of schizophrenic delirium" and to the over-all effect of this film as that of a grotesque, delirious lynching. How else "explain" scenes such as Bene, a knight in full armor, stubbornly attempting to make love to a nude woman (still involved with dishes) to the accompaniment of great clanking; or of Bene compulsively getting enmeshed in bandages until covered head to foot while injecting his buttocks in a public cafe, and repeating nonsensical phrases; or Bene, driven insane perhaps by obsessions and visions, permitting himself to be raped by an eager Madonna who afterwards smokes in bed while reading magazines, halo in place. There is jungle vegetation, a car that parks next to a bed, indoor barbed wire, an ambiguous duel danced with a publisher, and constant aural bombardment by the most famous, most sentimental arias of Italian opera.

THE LATE MATTHEW PASCAL (FEU MATHIAS PASCAL)

(Marcel L'Herbier, France, 1924) (F)

Bizarre adaption of Pirandello's story of a man who -- searching for absolute freedom -- is unexpectedly given an opportunity to exercise it. Alberto Cavalcanti's expressionist distortions of decor and architecture underscore the meta physical rhythms of this strange, disordered tale. Filled with black humor and semi-surrealist melodrama, this unpredictable adventure in ambiguous freedom, conceived by an arch-sceptic, erupts in a paradoxical denouement.

THE LIBERATION OF MANNIQUE MECHANIQUE

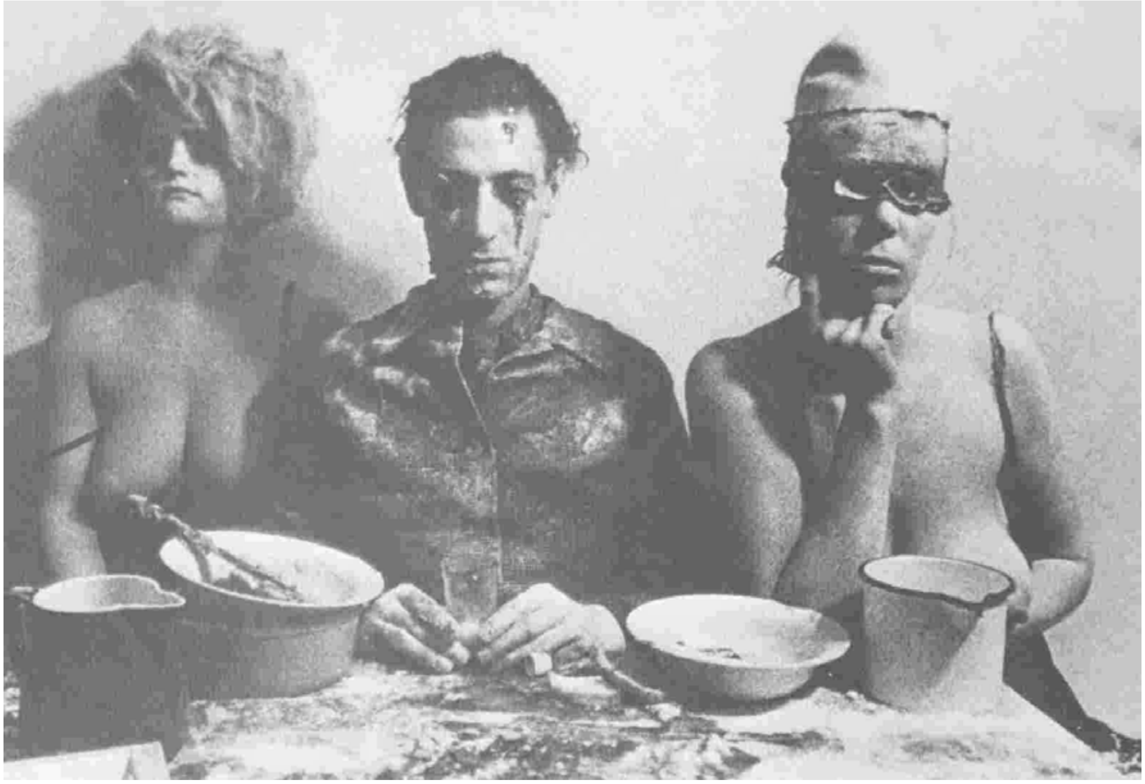
(Steve Arnold, USA, 1971)

A haunting, genuinely decadent work about mannequins that may be real and girls that may be models, journeying through strange universes towards possible self-discovery. An exorbitant, perverse sensibility informs the ambiguous images and events.

THE REALITY OF KAREL APPEL (DE WERKELIJKHEID VAN KAREL APPEL)

(Jan Vrijman, Holland, 1962)

The Dutch abstract-expressionist Appel shown "at work" in a film that aims to reveal his philosophy of art: "I paint like a barbarian in a barbarian age" -- and so he hits, attacks and slashes the canvas, flinging pigments against it. Passionate and violent, the act of painting is shown as an act of aggression against an insane world.



VISUAL TRAINING

(Frans Zwartjes, Holland, 1969)

Zwartjes' films are haunting excursions into desperate universes of alienation, in which male and female, while extricably bound to each other, never "connect". Here an impassive Keaton-like male engages in supremely sexual, ominous food orgies with voluptuous, half- nude women whom he paws impotently. Texture of image, crass make-up, and selective lighting further emphasize the expressionist character of the film.

A major new talent in international avant-garde cinema, Zwartjes creates hermetic, obsessive, and "decadent" universes, in which desperate, dissociated males and females, though inextricably bound to each other, never "connect". Here an impassive, Keaton- like figure engages in a sexual, ominous food orgy with voluptuous, half-nude women whom he paws impotently. A mysterious, powerful tension informs the action. Despite non-communication and mutual defilement of the grossest kind, a profoundly humanist statement emerges; compassion for these victims, "partners" in loneliness. Expressionist style, make-up and lighting as well as complex montage heighten the effect of the tragic tableaux, in which tortured non-heroes operate impotently in hostile space, facing us blindly, nakedly, with all defenses down; compelling us, perhaps, to confront ourselves in like manner.

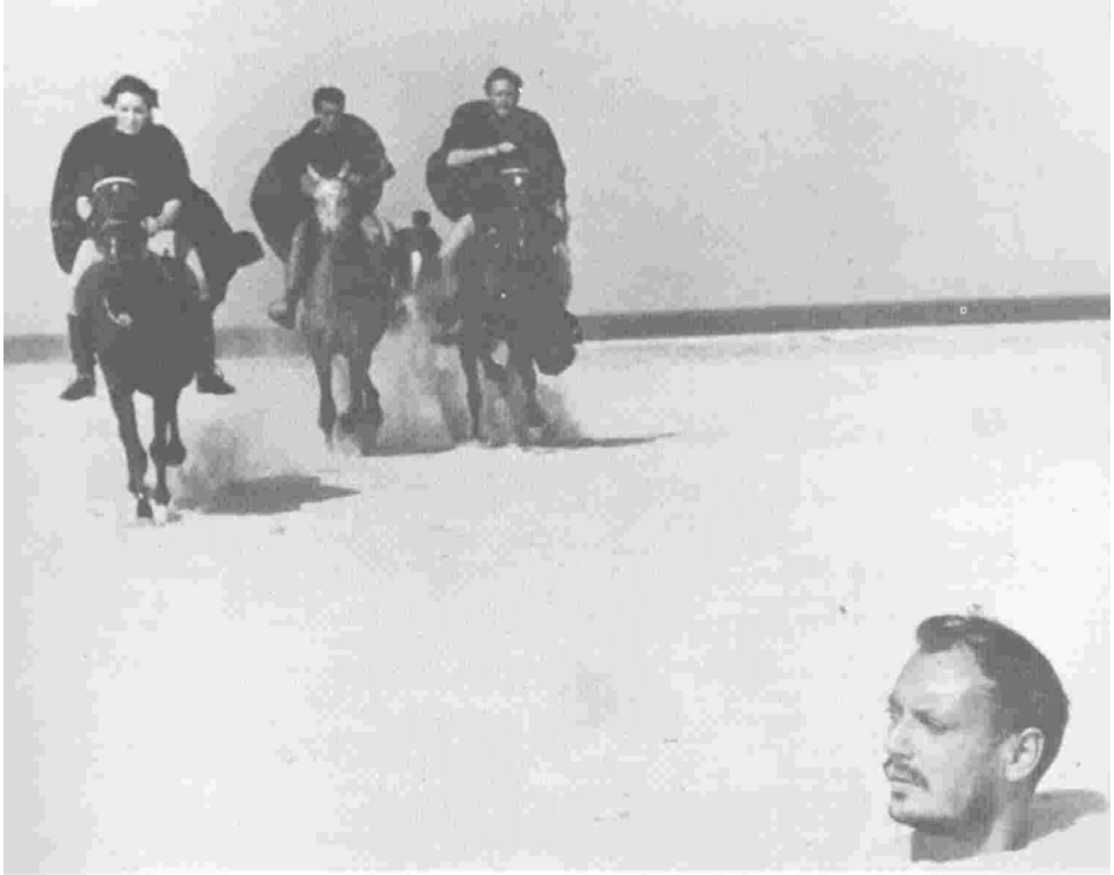
VIVA LA MUERTE

(Arrabal, France, 1971) (F)

The juxtaposition of two tongue-kissing males (one the spiritual and actual father to the other) denotes Arrabal's insistence on going "too far" to shock us into awareness. The film is a brutal, searing indictment of totalitarianism, as seen in the sado-masochistic nightmares of a young boy growing up at the moment of Franco's victory; horror and purification are achieved by appealing to the spectators subconcious fears (and desires). SC

This sensational first film by the famed avant-garde author employs violence and sex as a means of revolutionary purification and liberation. Only recently released from its French censorship ban, it is a paroxysm of anguish, a scream for liberty, and probably one of the most ferocious, violent films ever made, Reminiscent of Bunuel and Kozinsky it mingles, in hallucinatory images, the realities and nightmares of a 12-year-old boy growing into manhood at the moment of Franco's victory. (The film's locale -- though never identified -- is clearly Spain, while its intent is anti-totalitarian in an international, contemporary sense.) Every few minutes it veers from uncertain realism into the boy's imagination, beset by monstrous tortures, violence, death, and a primitive sadism that engulfs the spectator precisely because it does not impose upon, but merely activates his own subconcious fears and desires. The unspeakable mystery of adulthood, the secret temptation of the sin of sex, the inexplicable terror of government, and the monstrous suspicion of the mother's denunciation of the father to the authorities are fully revealed in the boy's anguished hallucinations. This is a document of a Catholic adolescence at a time of civil war, replete with blasphemous,

scatological, and incestuous incursions. Its nightmare sequences involve photographed television images and manipulated color negatives, creating an unearthly, expressionist ambiguity that makes the horror more pervasive for being indistinct; our subconcious immediately, obligingly supplies our own phobias to render the nightmare effective. Particularly horrifying is the repeated use of a melodic Dutch children's song; given the context, it assumes unsuspected hideousness, changing into an ominous metaphor of innocence soiled by corruption. That the film is filled with Arrabal's own obsessions is both undeniable and inevitable. Some therefore have been tempted to write it off as a narcissistic, pathological document; in reality, however, having passed through the monstrous turbulence of his imagination, we are restored, through violence, to a possible hope, a steely new humanism of the 70s, informed by Franco, concentration camps, A-bombs, and Vietnam. SC



VIVA LA MUERTE

(Arrabal, France, 1971) (F)

This unexpected, feared sight evokes subconcious fears of being buried alive; the more so when an additional danger threatens. Reminiscent of Eisenstein's similar shot in his unfinished Mexican epic, this is a grim reminder of a film of torture and oppression. SC

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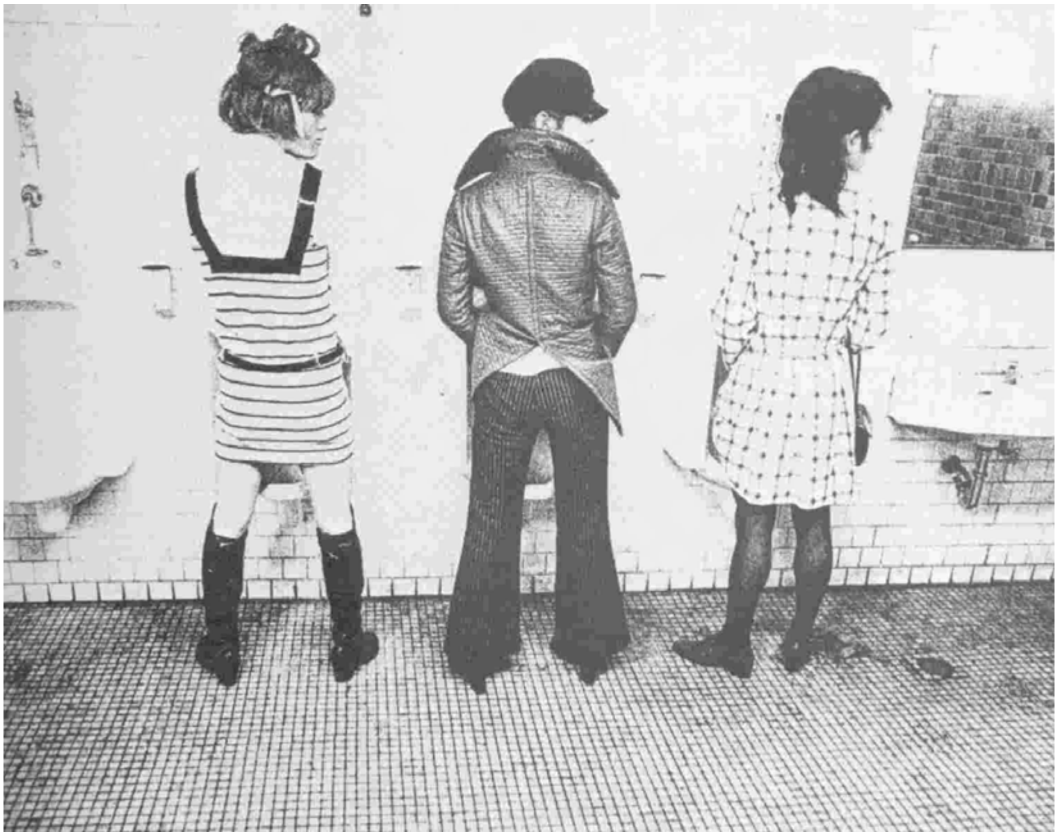
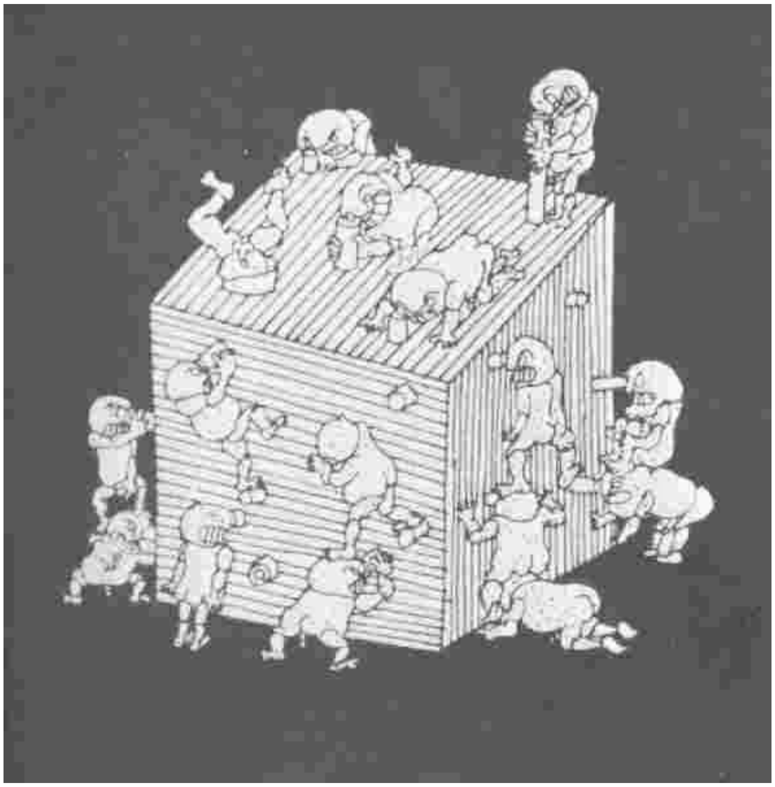


FUNERAL PARADE OF ROSES
(Toshio Matsumoto, Japan, 1969) (F)
Surrealist displacement. The ambiance is very contemporary, the positioning startling. A note of tension is introduced in the turning of the heads. In reality, however, this is a scene from an avant-gardemelodrama concerning Japanese homosexuals. The three girls are transvestites and the shot assumes another meaning.

SURREALISM:
THE CINEMA OF SHOCK

FILMS

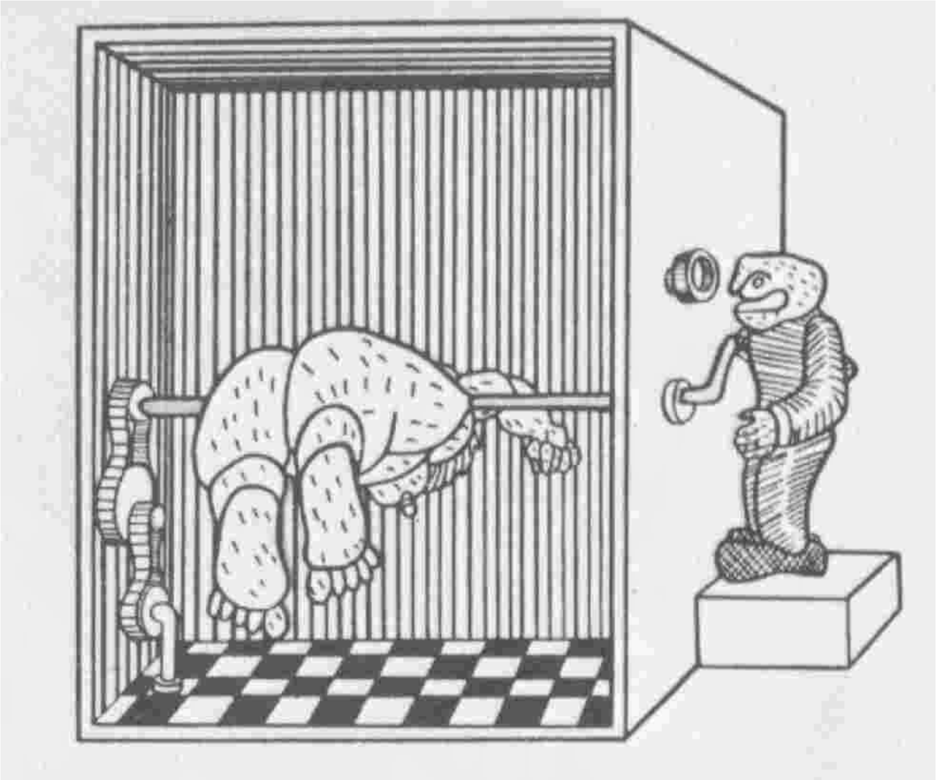


AOS

(Yoki Kuri, Japan, 1964)

The ugly voyeurs (ourselves) at work. Their busy lasciviousness is obvious; but we are not permitted to see what they see. The device of a closed box with peepholes is eminently cinematic; the blackness of the surrounding space removes the event from reality and makes it mythological.

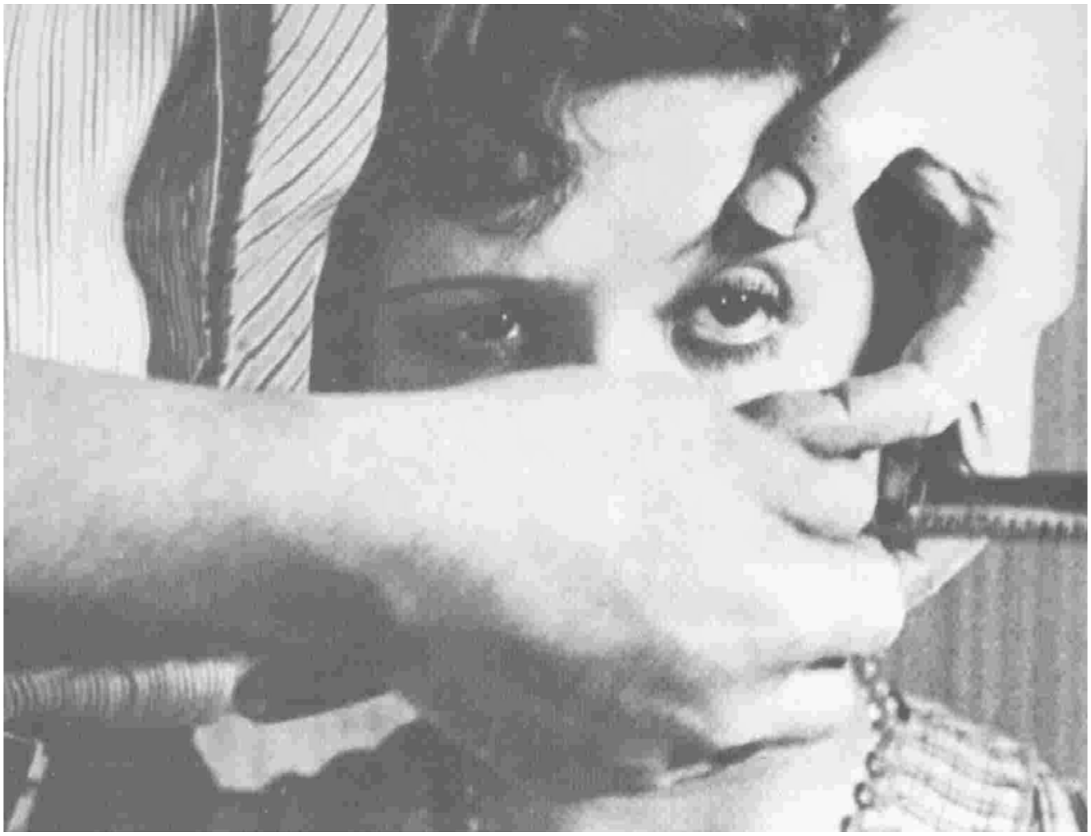
This extraordinary animation -- already a classic -- projects a universe of bizarre and frustrated lusts, in which monsters, voyeurs, and misshapen objects engage in nightmarish and often sado-masochistic outrages amongst Freudian symbols of anxiety. Max Ernst and Bosch come to mind, but the rage against repression is entirely Japanese and ideological: sexual anti-puritanism as a liberating device.



AOS

(Yoki Kuri, Japan, 1964)

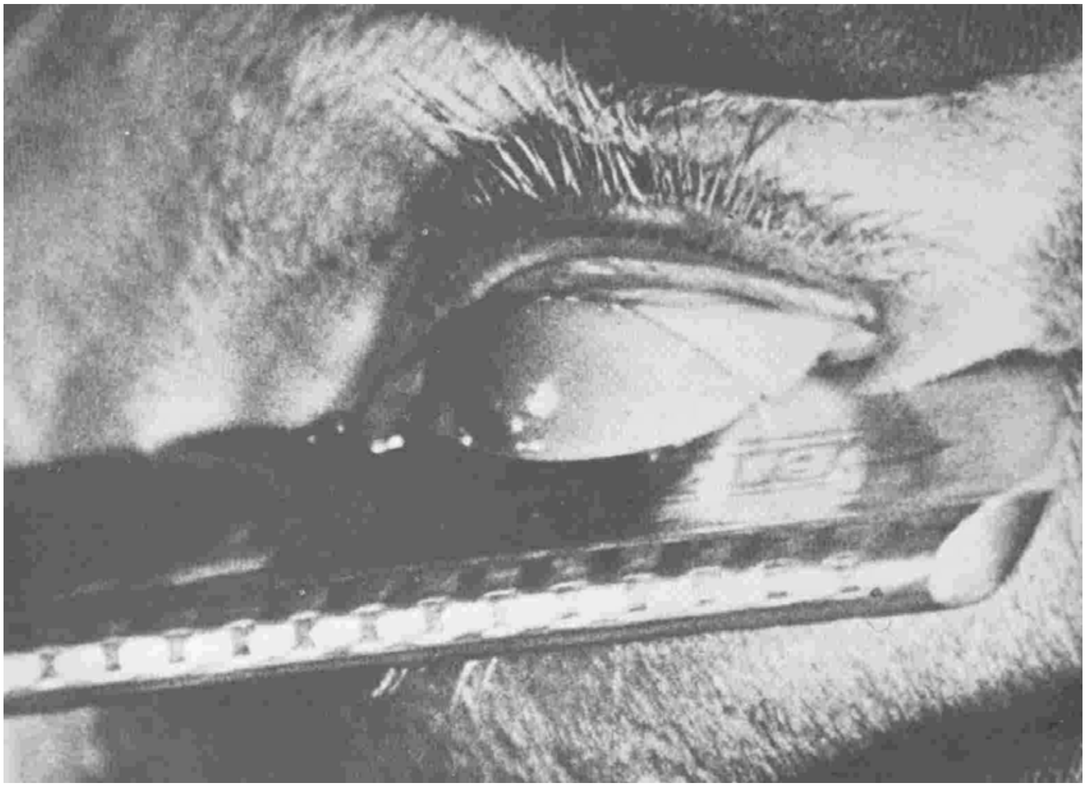
A universe of secret, illicit lusts, powered by mechanical contrivance, the intent is sado-masochist, the woman, incongruously, very hairy. The sexual anti-puritanism is viewed as a surrealist, hence liberating device.



AN ANDALUSIAN DOG
(UN CHIEN ANDALOU)

(Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, France, 1929)

One of the most shocking moments of world cinema. To open the viewer to new awareness, the first sequence of this surrealist classic consists of the (on-camera) slicing of a girl's eye (the razor wielded by Bunuel). For impact, the camera is at eye-level (this is where we automatically look). The woman's submission is complete; we fear what might happen; and, for once in cinema, it does. SC



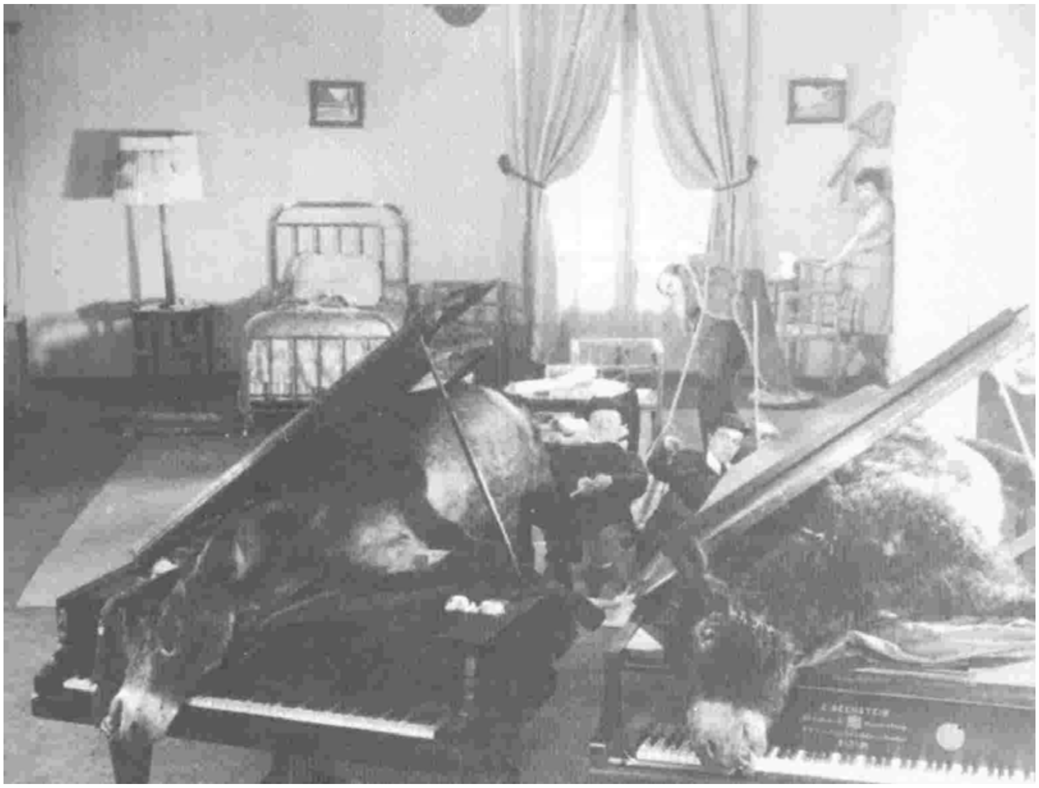
AN ANDALUSIAN DOG
(UN CHIEN ANDALOU)

(Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, France, 1929)

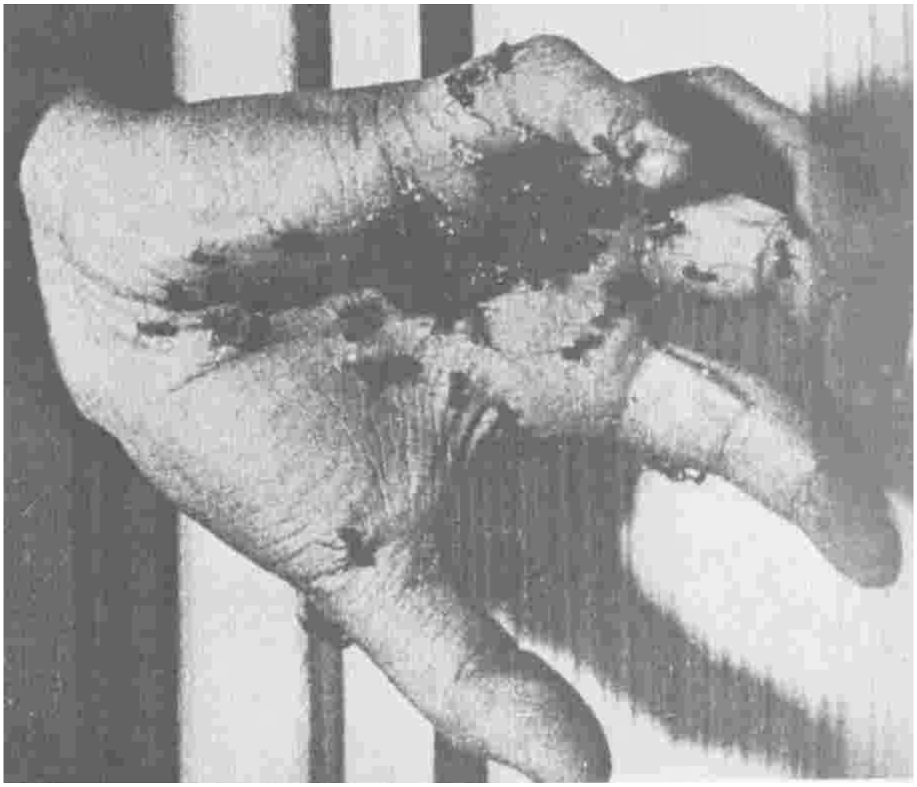
Though the preceding still often appears in print, this one does not; an interesting example of visual censorship, since the former only portrays the moment before the act and hence is not representative of the film which continues into this shot. **SC**

"This film", said Bunuel, describing what was to become the most famous avant-garde film ever made -- "draws its inspiration from poetry, freed from reason and traditional morality. It has no intention of attracting or pleasing the spectator -- indeed, on the contrary, it attacks him to a degree to which he belongs to a society with which surrealism is at war ... this film is meant to explode in the hands of its enemies." There is no "plot" -- only innuendos; no logic except that of the nightmare; no reality except the inner universe of the subconcious. The continuity, if any, arises solely in the mind of the viewer. The illogical, dream-like progression of feared or forbidden images in this intentionally shocking work has by now entered film history and has almost acquired a patina of respectability, so far has the world moved towards real and worse nightmares. Yet we remain disturbed by the close-up of live ants crawling in a wound in the palm of a hand, by the sudden, "comic" transposition of a woman's underarm hair into a man's moustache, by the couple buried to their necks in the sand. The inordinately lustful protagonist fingers the woman's breasts which are suddenly transformed into buttocks; a severed hand is poked by a stick. But if these images have to some extent become more "acceptable", one sequence has remained shockingly "liberating" as it was originally: the slitting of the woman's eyeball, on camera, deftly conducted in close-up by the young

Bunuel himself. By placing this sequence at the start of his first film (and thereby his life's work as one of the cinema's most original talents), Bunuel serves warning of his intention: to change our conciousness.



AN ANDALUSIAN DOG
(UN CHIEN ANDALOU)
(Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, France, 1929)
The hero, attempting to take a girl by force, is dragged back by the clutter of his inhibitions and simultaneously offers a possible definition of Western civilization: religion, culture (the piano) and bleeding carcasses. SC



AN ANDALUSIAN DOG
(UN CHIEN ANDALOU)

(Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, France, 1929)

The ants emerge from the wound. The cramped position of the fingers, the vile scurrying about of the insects, and the impermissible combination of the two, trigger submerged atavistic fears. Strong verticals, shadows, and cut-off effect of the door-frame add to the feeling of dread. SC

THE CHURCH BELL (LA CLOCHE)

(Jean L'Hote, France, 1964)

A man, accidentally trapped beneath a church bell about to be installed "walks off" with it. The sight of a church bell majestically moving through Paris streets and suburbs, creating inevitable havoc, is a splendidcinematic equivalent of a surrealist object in action, created by simple displacement from its customary surroundings.

THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE
(LA CHARME DISCRETE DE LA BOURGEOISIE)

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1972) (F)

Bunuel's mingling of realism and dream here moves him closer to the anarchic freedom of his early surrealist period, distilling seditious intent into sequences of limpid purity. In this most insane of all worlds, engulfed by war and destruction, the inperturbable upper class attempts, ever more irrelevantly, to maintain gentility and civilized values (good meals and manners, empty talk and reverence for money). But reality "breaks through" more insistently in a series of outrageous events they delicately attempt to reduce to manageable proportions. A particularly disturbing incursion of unreality takes place in a sequence during which they sit down to a long-delayed meal only to have one of the drape walls revealed as curtain and themselves as "actors" on what has suddenly become a stage. As they are "prompted" -- before a hissing audience -- one admits sheepishly: "I've forgotten my lines" -- a perfect comment by the moralist- filmmaker on the contemporary ruling class.

EATEN HORIZONS
(SPISTE HORISONTER)

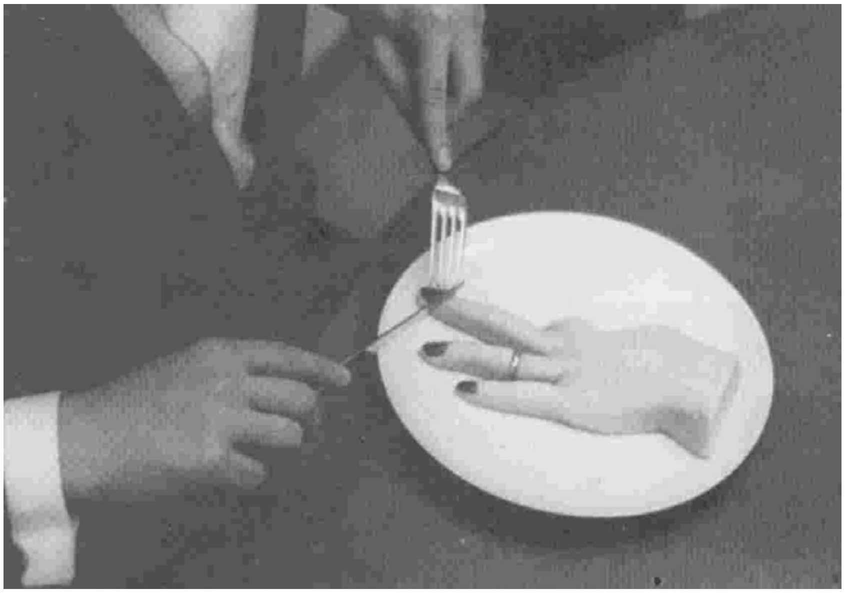
(Wilhelm Freddie, Denmark, 1950)

Two men, using the back-side of a nude woman as their table, eat a loaf of bread, then cut a hole in the woman's body and eat her insides.

AN EATER

(Kazutomo Fuzino, Japan, 1963)

Accompanied by exaggerated eating sounds, a waitress falls into a dream in which the chef operates on her, removing gurgling fluids, spaghetti, an eye, and a man who's nose he cuts off. This "dish" is served to voracious eaters who devour it. After she awakens, she vomits, producingan endless string that finally enmeshes all the eaters. A macabre surrealist classic.



FINGEREXERCISE

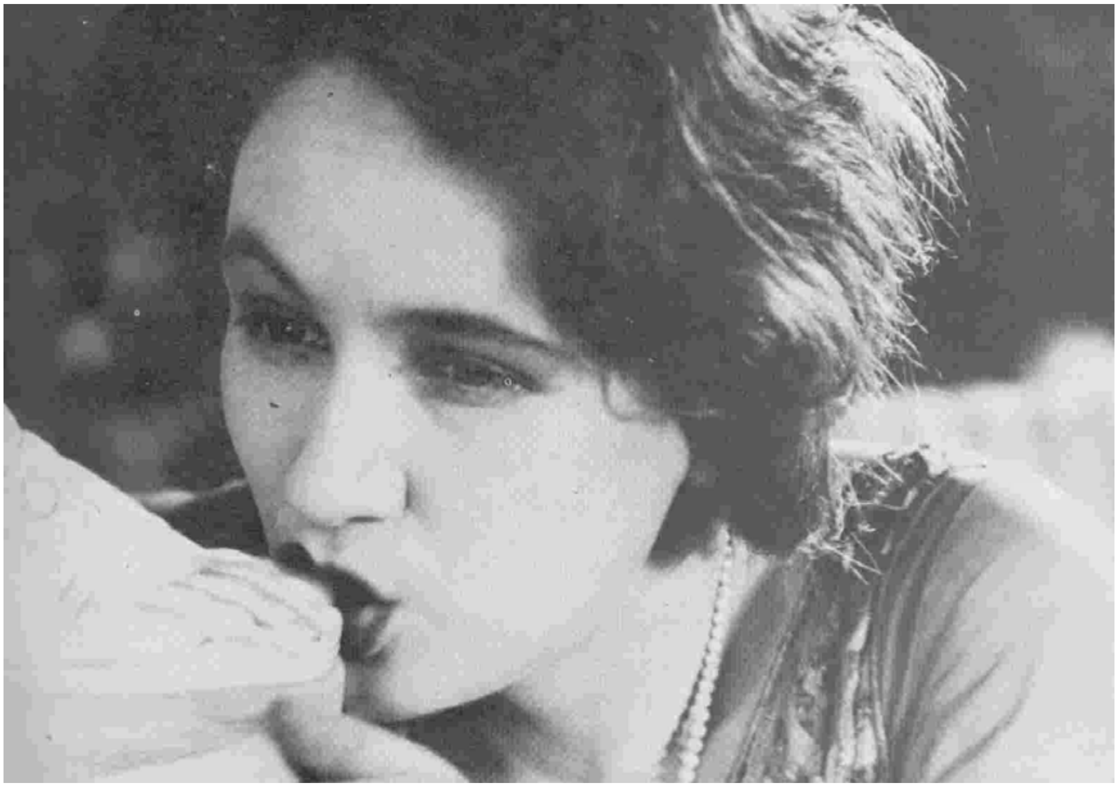
(Robert Schaer, Switzerland, 1969)

A severed limb is always frightening, the more so when it is about to be nonchalantly consumed. Both eater and victim are well-groomed: cuffs, nail polish, and wedding ring add to the over-all effect. Most unsettling is the very while plate and the impending dissection of a finger, the position of knife and fork impeccably conforming to European eating etiquette.

THE GIFT (LE CADEAU)

(Jacques Vasseur & Dick Roberts, France, 1961)

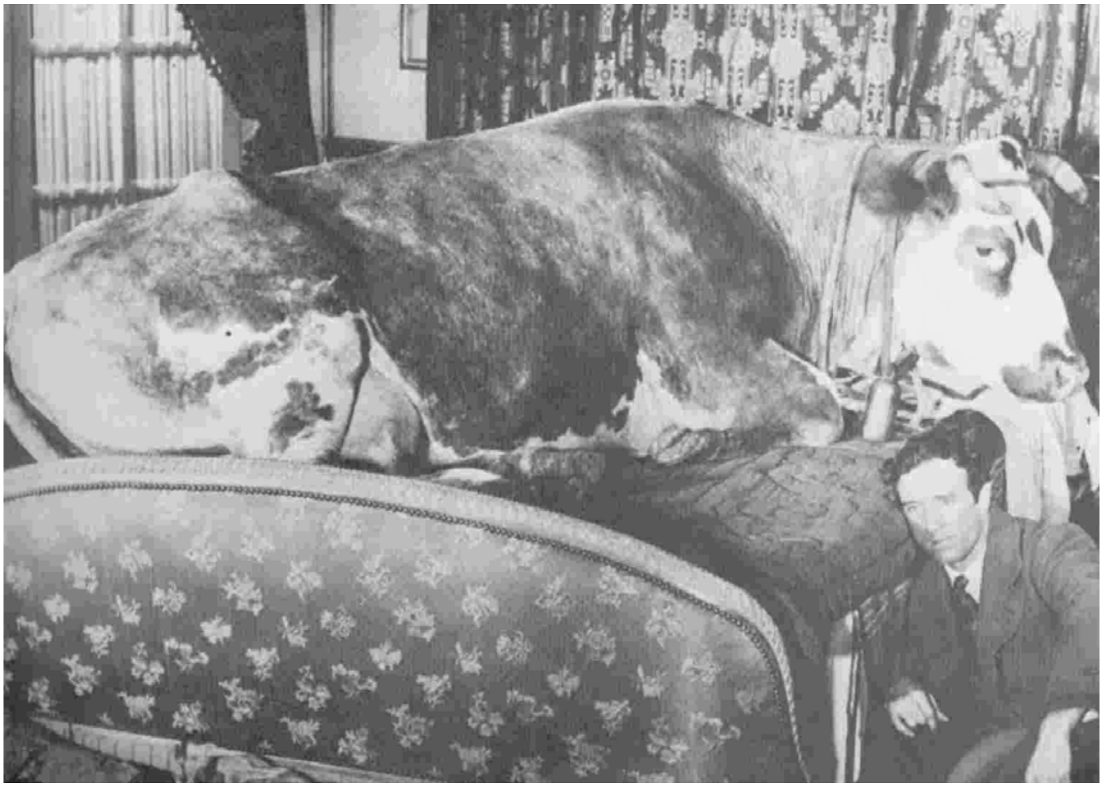
The entire plot of this delightful cartoon is based on the shock effect of "misplaced" sounds: a cow that honks, a horn that moos, a baby that screeches marches. Here sound instead of object is torn from its customary surroundings. One of the few examples of "aural surrealism" on record.



L'AGE D'OR

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1930)

According to the Surrealists, nothing can counteract the deadly burden of institutions and Establishment except irrational, anarchic, wild love. In a film devoted to this theme, a frustrated, sexually aroused woman passionately sucks the toe of a statue in a display of foot fetishism quite typical of Bunuel's work; further implications are inevitable. SC



L'AGE D'OR

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1930)

Unexpected and unacceptable combinations of thoroughly familiar elements introduce a feeling of marvel and unrest, opening the subconcious to new possibilities and hence, potential freedom. The cow is very large indeed; the bed very sensuous; the man in a swoon or stupor; in any case, brutal reality has supervened in the sanctuary of the bourgeois -- his bedroom. SC

LA GRAN SIGURIYA

(Jose Val Del Omar, Spain, 1955)

An explosive, cruel work of the deepest passion, a silent cry, this is a mystic evocation of the nightmares of Spain. Reminiscent of Bunuel's *Land Without Bread*, it succeeds in conveying nameless terror and anxiety. One of the great unknown works of world cinema; surfacing at the 1958 First International Experimental Film Festival in Brussels, it just as quickly disappeared and is now unavailable.

MAGRITTE

(Luc De Heusch, Belgium, 1955?)

Souvenirs of a voyage into the universe of the Belgian surrealist painter. The film is an evocation of the mystery and macabre humor of paintings that unexpectedly juxtapose familiar objects or situations and dissociate them from their environment. This is one of the few films to deal with the philosophical basis of contemporary art. ("Reality is a word devoid of meaning; space is not certain; the world has lost all consistency. My task it to evoke the mystery." - Magritte)

MR. FRENHOFER AND THE MINOTAUR

(Sidney Peterson, USA, 1949)

Surrealist interpretation of Balzac's prophetic and oblique paraphrase of modern art, this is the story of a 17th-century painter who, obsessed with perfection, modifies his paintings until they become unrecognizable. The film is notable for its poetic, tongue-in-cheek commentary, teasingly delivered in the style of a Joycean "interior monologue". Verbal disintegration and visual distortions further contribute to the dream atmosphere.

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8 x 8

(Hans Richter, USA, 1957)

Jean Cocteau in a curiously reverential still shot from Richter's "chess" film, in which Arp, Tanguy, Duchamp, and others perform as chess pieces. This episode, "Queening of the Pawn", was written and directed by Cocteau.

OUR LADY OF THE SPHERE

(Larry Jordan, USA, 1969)

A rich surreal fantasy, derivative of Max Ernst's juxtapositions of old engravings and irrelevant objects or events. A particularly successful sequence shows several farm animals in an old engraving looking at an easel on which -- in unexpected animation -- various drawings rapidly appear and change in spectacular fashion.

THE RUNNING, JUMPING AND STANDING STILL FILM

(Richard Lester & Peter Sellers, Great Britain, 1959)

Shot in two days, this wild early collaboration between Peter Sellers, Richard Lester (*A Hard Day's Night*) and Spike Milligan (of the Goon Show) is a perfect example of surrealist comedy. The various protagonists undergo ridiculous catastrophes, exaggerated non-sequiturs, and Keystonian mayhem in a sylvan setting. Produced at hardly any cost at all, it proves once again that talent is more important than money.

RUNS GOOD

(Pat O'Neill, USA, 1971)

As seen in this film, the surrealist cinema of the 1970s works with tools the original surrealists never dreamed of: solarization, multiple exposures, "artificial" contrast, varying image size, negative color, three-dimensional effects. The title comes from the windshield of a battered old car in a used-car lot.

THE WORLD OF PAUL DELVAUX (LE MONDE DE PAUL DELVAUX)

(Henri Storck, Belgium, 1947)

For once, a film about a painter that does not show a numbing procession of works, but rather enters his universe, as the camera glides uninterruptedly and dream-like, from painting to painting, their frames and identities obliterated. Neither lecture nor spectacle, but an experience, this is a curious, disturbing journey through the fantastic world of the celebrated Belgian surrealist, in which luxuriant, icy female nudes and fully- dressed, meek men co-exist in mysterious landscapes.

The score by Andre Souris and a surrealist poem written and spoken by Paul Eluard further contribute to an unsettling, magical experience. Storck's outstanding work extends from early radical documentaries to later surrealist films.

THE LEAD SHOES

(Sidney Peterson, USA, 1949)

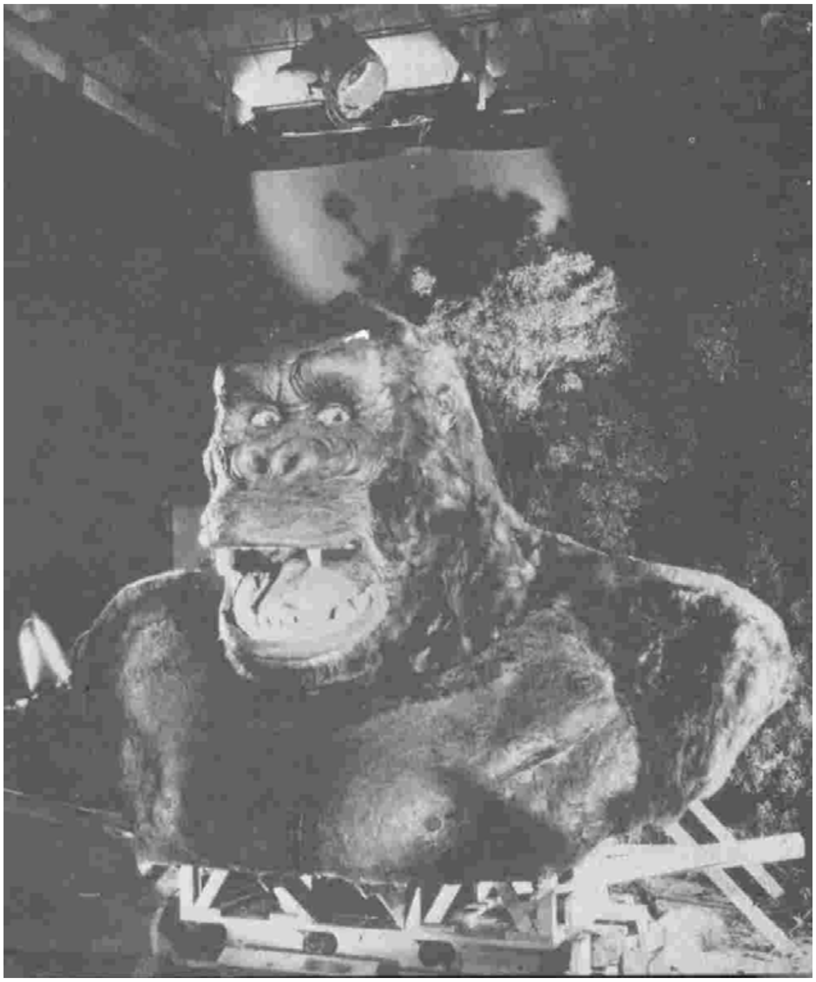
A yielding to the inevitable, an attempt at memory or remorse, as the wife-mother passively clings to the empty symbol of her murdered husband, perhaps killed by his sons in a nightmarish surrealist film.

The most accomplished work of America's foremost surrealist filmmaker. This is a hypnotic, obsessive nightmare of parricide and compulsive attempts to undo the deed. The basic images -- the blood, the knife, the bread voraciously attacked -- shock by their atavistic simplicity. The hallucinatory effect is reinforced by the extraordinary soundtrack, an enigmatic exploration of two old English ballads, scrambled in jam session style and interwoven with experimental sound.

KING KONG

(Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack, USA, 1933)

Shall we ever accept -- or overcome --
the horror (however delicious)
evoked in us by this curious monster?



KING KONG
(production still)
And why, even when we find out how
it was done, is our horror not lessened?

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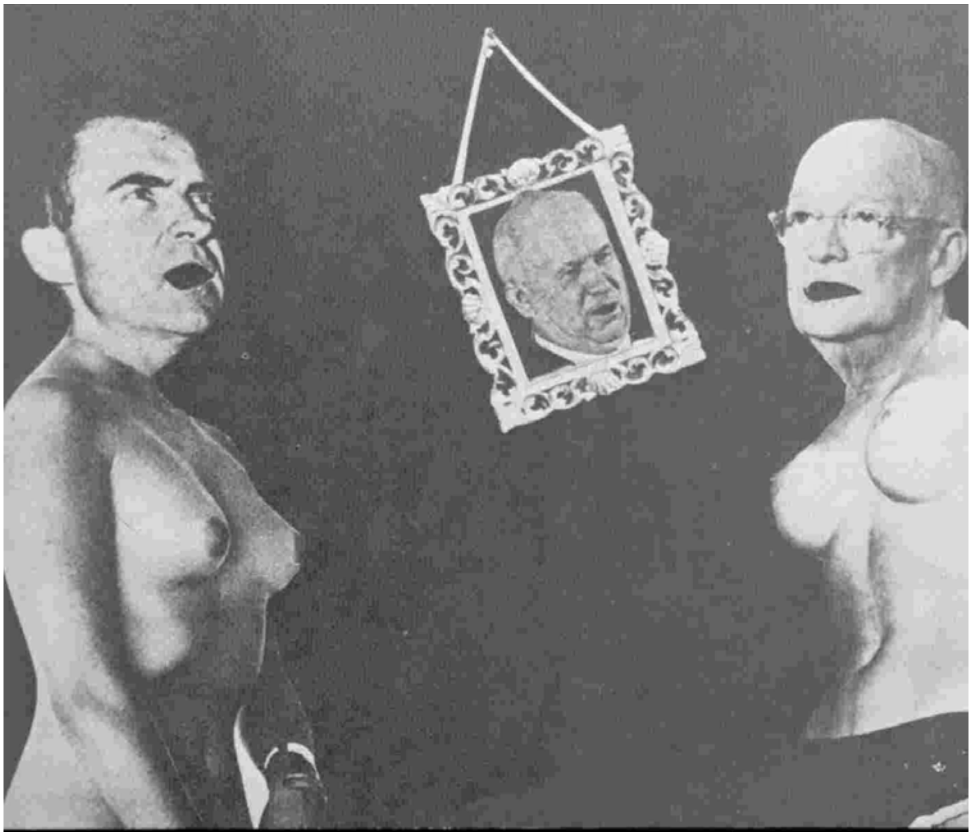
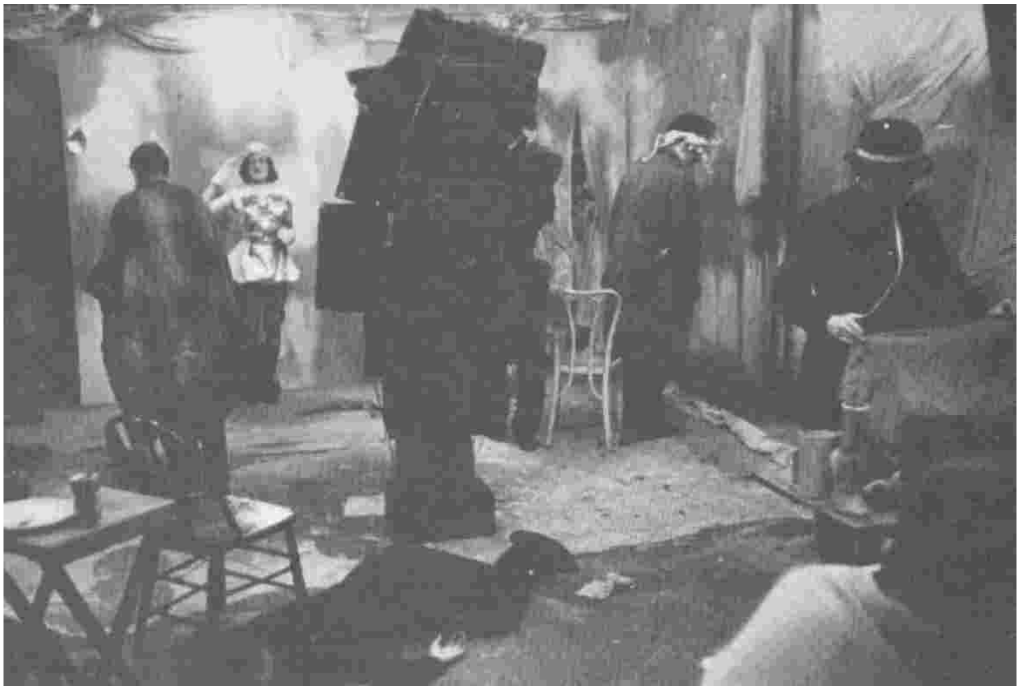


BLACK AND WHITE BURLESQUE
(Richard Preston, USA, 1958)
Several taboos merge to create instantaneous, unconscious shock; nudity, unacceptable sex change, vulgar desecration of national leaders, and, worse still, of the dead. But is it an insult to be a woman?

DADA AND POP: ANTI-ART?

FILMS



FOTODEATH

(Al Kouzel, USA, 1958?)

A film record of one of Claes Oldenburg's celebrated happenings -- largely improvised, mysterious or humorous, neo-dadaist or surreal events, not necessarily causal or meaningful, which sardonically comment on an absurd universe and aim at fusing actor and spectator, art and life.

ANEMIC CINEMA

(Marcel Duchamp, France, 1926)

One of the earliest dadaist classics, Duchamp's mysteriously rotating circular discs evoke true three-dimensional illusion (without glasses), their playful solemnity further subverted by verbal dadaist puns.

A LA MODE

(Stan Vanderbeek, USA, 1961)

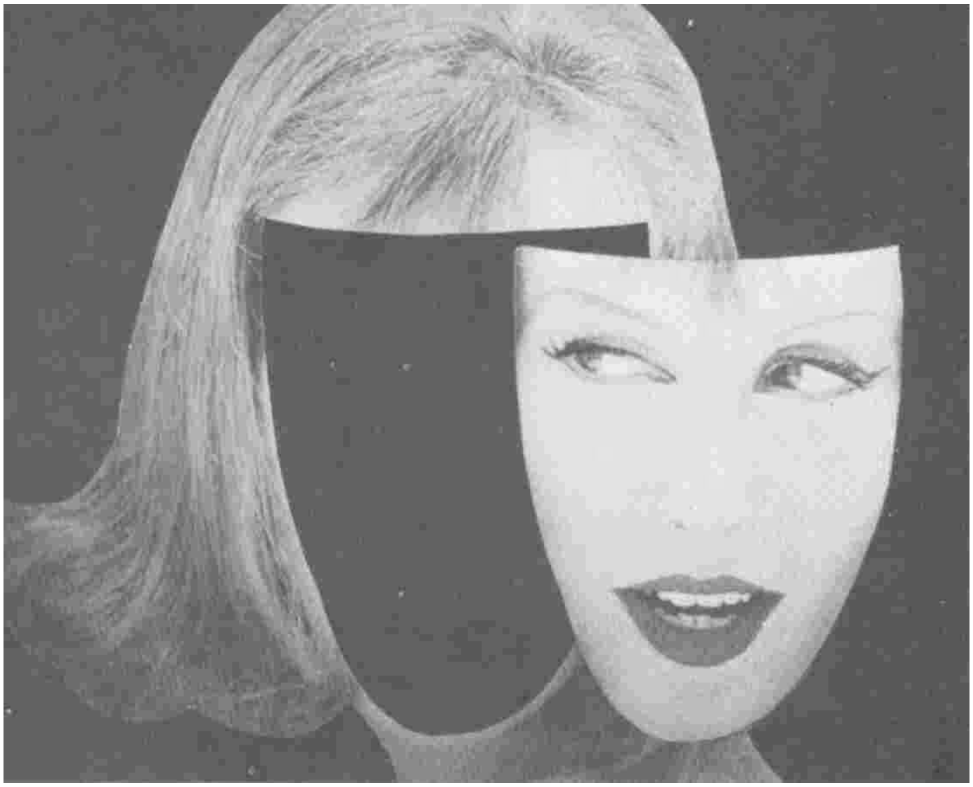
A satire on fashions, style, vanity, and the female form divine. The film attacks the visual excesses of our time, using girlie and glamour magazine cut-outs as raw material. "A cine-igmatic comment on the mythology of women" (Stan Vanderbeek)

THE DEATH OF MARIA MALIBRAN (DER TOD DER MARIA MALIBRAN)

(Werner Schroeter, Germany, 1971) (F)

This bizarre film by one of the most original directors now

working in Germany is hermetic, expressionist, oblique, and of a creative perversity that bespeaks the presence of a genius. Purporting to deal with a real-life 19th century diva "whose popularity was such that over-exertion led to her death while singing", the film is actually a grisly series of frozen or tortured tableaux (predominantly lesbian in implication) of heavily rouged, frequently ugly women who, pretending to sing heavy opera, go through contorted, icy attempts at communication that lead nowhere. The lip-sync is off; the singing is off-pitch; mouths are frequently open while no sound issues forth, or closed, with mellifluous arias or cheap popular songs heard on scratchy renditions of old records. Neither burlesque nor slapstick, the film's intent, at least in the beginnning, is nevertheless ironical and subversive, though mysteriously so. However, it grows increasingly dark and more threatening, with screams, faces bathed in Vaseline, red, wet mouths, smeared eye shadows, and dehumanized figures. One cannot "explain" Schroeter's work, other than recognize his debunking of opera as a metaphorical rejection of bourgeois society; but one trembles in recognition of a prospective major talent.



WHAT, WHO, HOW

(Stan Vanderbeek, USA, 1955)

Ethereal Vogue models, terrible beasts, and bedraggled knights in a grotesque animation collage concerning "the unexpected beneath the real". However much the image draws attention to

its own artificiality, one cannot avoid
uneasiness at the displacement of "real"
face and the resulting "emptiness".

A DAY IN TOWN
(EN DAG I STADEN)

(Pontus Hulten and Hans Nordenstrom, Sweden, 1956)

A dadaist explosion that starts as a typical Hollywood travelogue of Stockholm and ends in the city's total destruction by fire and dynamite. This is a hilarious anarchist film; made by the then unknown Hulten now director of Stockholm's Museum of Modern Art. In a particularly subversive scene, the fire engine, arriving at a fire, goes up in flames.

COSMIC RAY

(Bruce Conner, USA, 1962)

Eight images per second flash by at the brink of retinal perception in this extraordinary pop art collage of a nude dancing girl surrounded by Academy leaders, war footage, Mickey Mouse, and the raising of the American flag at Iwo Jima. An attempt at a total audio-visual experience, this hypnotic four-minute film contains two thousand different images.

HOMAGE TO JEAN TINGUELY

(Robert Breer, USA, 1960)

Eighty bicycle-, tricycle- and wagon-wheels, a piano of sorts, some metal drums, an addressing machine, a bathtub, bottles, a meterological balloon powered by fifteen motors; the film records the short life and sudden demise of Tinguely's bizarre protest against mechanized society, the "self-creating and self-destroying" machine that committed suicide in the garden of New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1960.

OH DEM WATERMELONS

(Robert Nelson, USA, 1965)

Climactic still from the definitive film on watermelons. They can be cut, sawed, shot, run over, used as bombs, or for masturbation. A sickly satire on documentary films, its manic intensity spills over into somber solemnity in which the satirical almost becomes the impossible. SC

The definite film about watermelons: they are cut, sawed, shot, run over, used as bombs or for masturbation, appear at the UN, and in toilet bowls. A sick take-off on documentary films, it also seems to comment on racial cliches.

PIANISSIMO

(Carmen D'Avino, USA, 1963)

An exumberant and joyous animation -- one of the few "optimistic" works of the American avant garde -- this film creates an artificial world from elements of reality. In a riot of color, the invisible artist decorates a drab player-piano by stop-motion animation in rhythm to a driving musical score.

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF UNCLE SAM

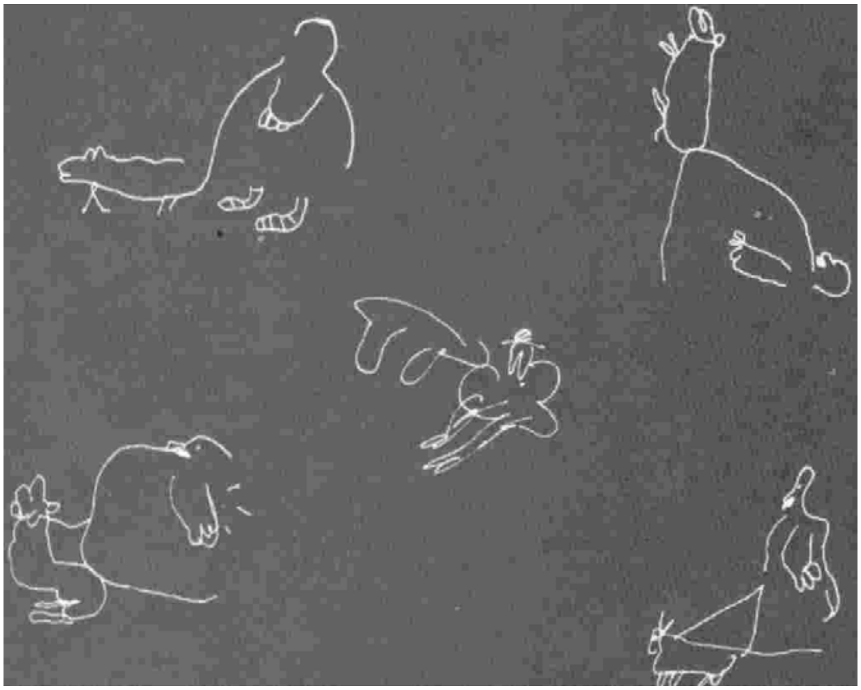
(Robert Mitchell and Dale Chase, USA, 1971)

An original and sophisticated animated film, with strong pop art and surreal influences. Uncle Sam and the Statue of Liberty are in chains in a future totalitarian America ruled by Pentagon and Dollar Men. The Statue of Liberty is finally tied to a stake in Yankee Stadium, but rescued by Uncle Sam and they go off into the sunset.

JAMESTOWN BALOOS

(Robert Breer, USA, 1967)

Impish and sophisticated visual puns, flashing by in abstract rhythms at extreme speed, debunk Delft, Napoleon, Sophia Loren, the military, Dulles. This is a visual assault by an iconoclastic cinematic genius.



MAN AND DOG OUT FOR AIR

(Robert Breer, USA, 1957)

Dadaist and abstract influences converge in this subtle animation by a most original avant-gardist. The images constantly merge, collapse, change into lines and shapes of astonishing fluidity and expressive power, as the director re-invents space and inflicts gengle dadaist outrage on a defenseless world.

SCIENCE FRICTION

(Stan Vanderbeek, USA, 1960)

A neo-dadaist, non-verbal political satire, ominous and comical, this film reflects mass society, conformism, and bombs large enough to blast the Eiffel tower and the Pieta into outer space. At the end, a mysterious gloved hand picks up the spinning earth and makes an omelette with it.

SKULLDUGGERY

(Stan Vanderbeek, USA, 1956)

Animated collage of very important people are satirically fused with live, often incongruous, newsreel footage by double exposure and other cinematic witchcraft, "mixing the eye with live scenes and unlive scenes,to jibe at the politicians, and world so-called leaders".

SORT OF A COMMERCIAL FOR AN ICEBAG

(Michel Hugo, USA, 1970)

An inherently "insane" pop art idea -- the projected creation of an 18-foot long and 11-foot high icebag as living, motorized sculpture -- is seriously discussed by Claes Oldenburg, complete with blackboard; he even superimposes it on a model of St. Peter's Cupola as a possible site. The artist's teasing seriousness and the cool, restrained humor beneath the surface are typical of pop art. The icebag ultimately made its appearance at Osaka's Expo '79 as Oldenberg's first kinetic sculpture.

DREAMS THAT MONEY CAN BUY
(Hans Richter, USA, 1948)
The most private artist of our generation -- Marcel Duchamp -- here shows himself fully, exhibiting his famous moving discs to the camera many years after their creation. The expression is proud, defiant, secret, and of an inner sadness.

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THE NAVIGATOR
(Buster Keaton & Donald Crisp, USA, 1924)
The gentle, implacable subverter who constantly breaks through surfaces and value systems of organized society, innocently timing an egg in a rather large pot, while marooned on an empty ocean liner. Keaton's deadly serious encounters with kitchen equipment suitable only for large numbers create -- because rooted in logic -- their own seditious, surrealist impact.

THE COMIC TRADITION

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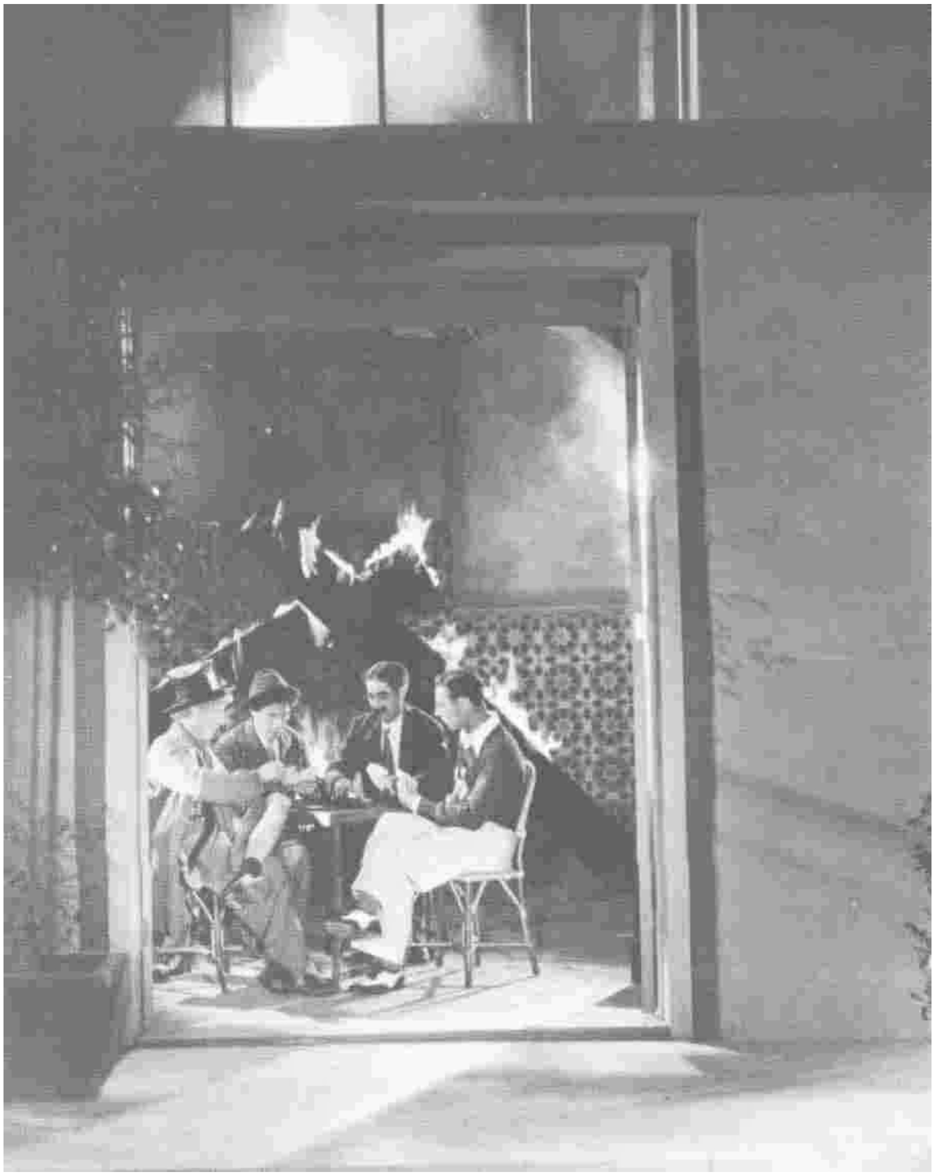
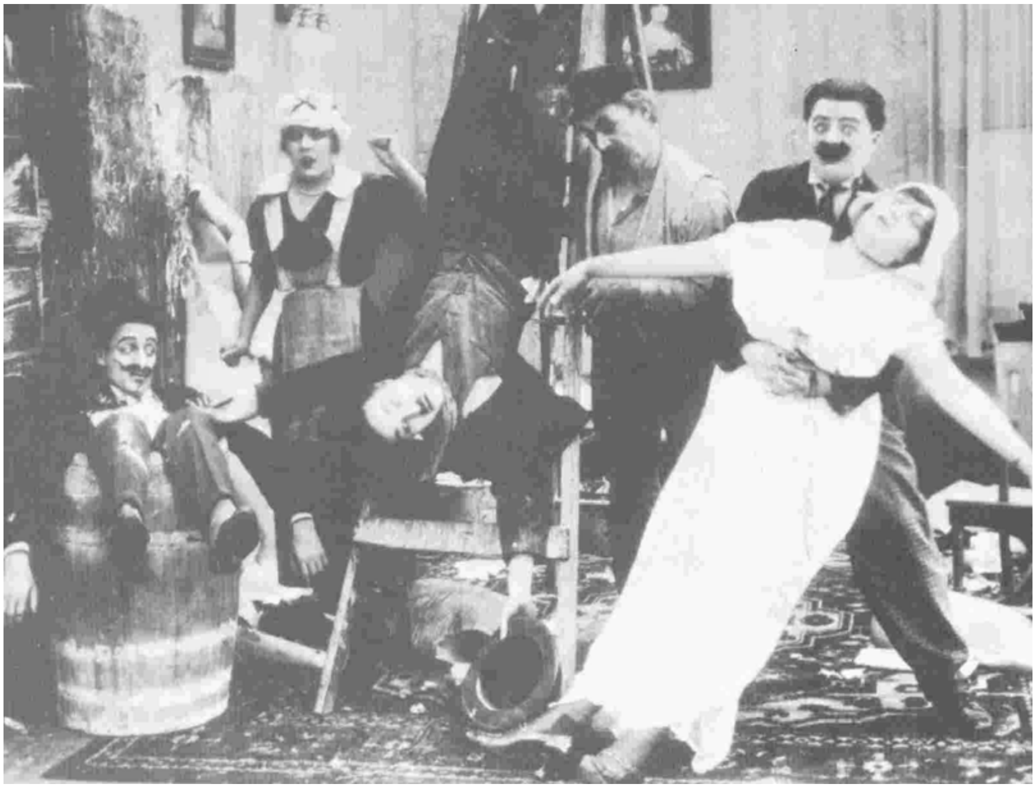


HORSE FEATHERS

(Norman McLeod, USA, 1932)

The inperturbable destroyers continue an innocent game of cards, while the house (if not religion) is on fire. A strangely evocative image stresses the Marx Brothers' more subversive side and affinity to surrealism; in Bunuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, too, an attempt is made to continue life as usual while the world falls apart.



WORK

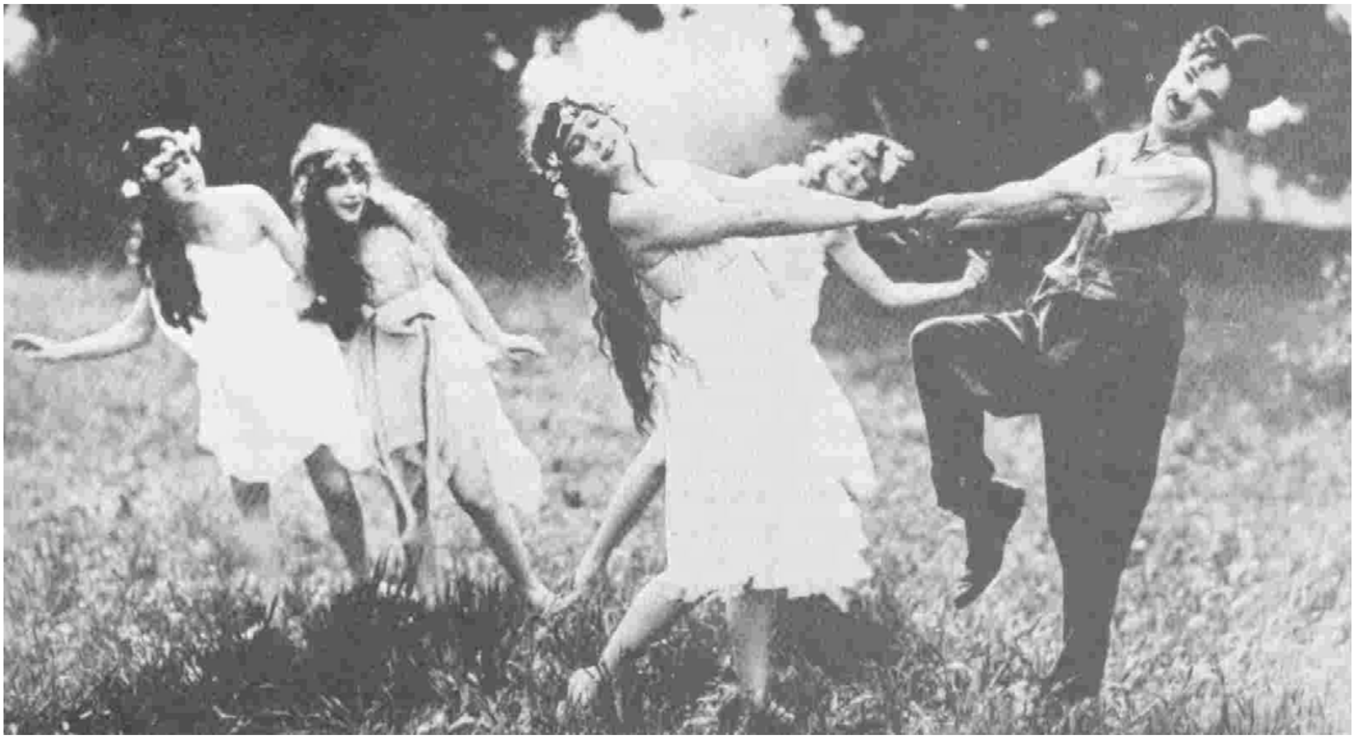
(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1915)

Chaplin as paperhanger. It is still early in his career and the influence of Sennett is clearly apparent. Though the composition includes melodrama and slapstick, the destructive action attacks the values represented by the rug and picture on the wall.

MONSIEUR VERDOUX

(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1947)

Toward the end of his career, a wiser, immensely more sophisticated artist returns to another attack on bourgeois respectability, portraying the murderer-as-businessman whose product happens to be the elimination of women. In this scene of domestic bliss, involving murderer and victim, Chaplin, dapper con man, plays the "cultivated" bourgeois but there is pain and wisdom in the sad eyes that almost glance at us.



SUNNYSIDE

(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1919)

One of the most lyrical of Chaplin's sequences, this dream ballet with four almost mythological maidens is both serious and satirical. The impossibility of (a very much longed-for) romanticism is confirmed by Chaplin's falling into a bed of cactus. The incidental, dynamic composition reveals simultaneous "curved" movements to left and right that cancel in perfect visual harmony.

LIMELIGHT

(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1952)

In this ambiguous work, Chaplin treads a dangerous line between fiction and autobiography, subverting his own image of the great clown by professing that he can no longer make his audience laugh. In an unexpected manner (over which Chaplin seems not to have complete control), he succeeds rather more than intended. SC

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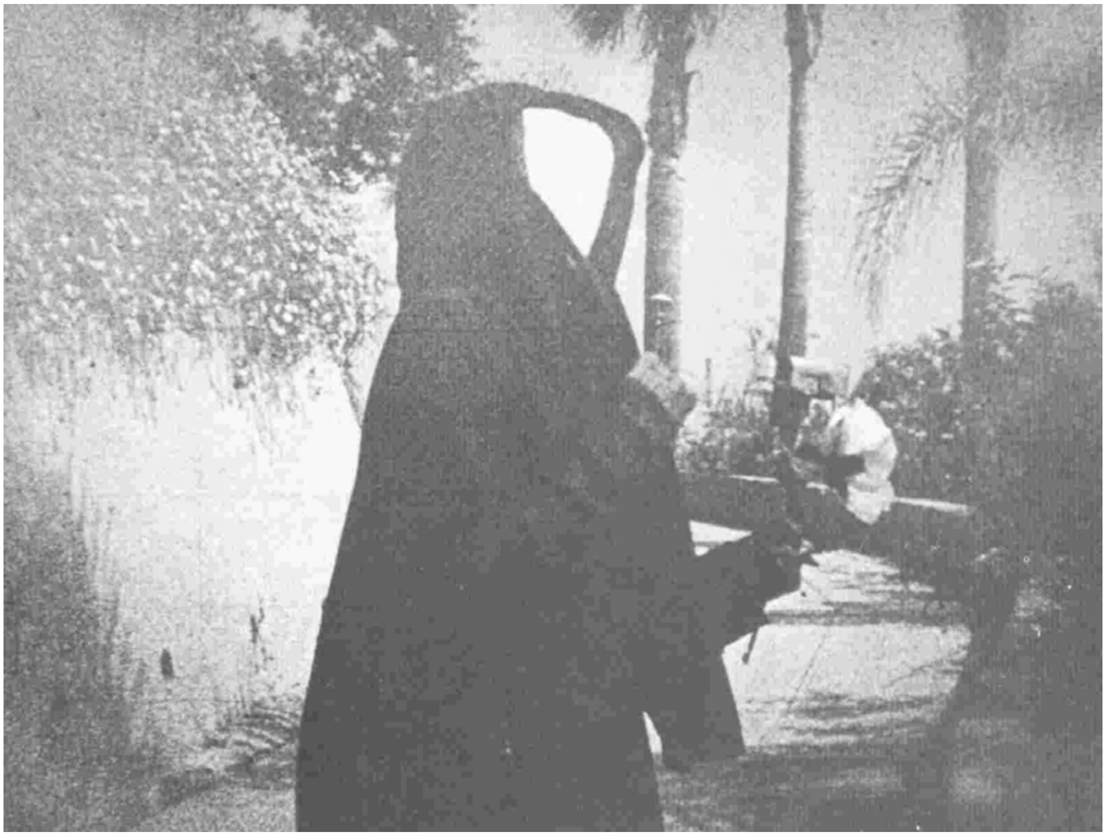

MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON
(Maya Deren, USA, 1940)
The mirror that reflects nothing is an archetypal fear of man, even more appalling when used in place of a face, its white sharpness in sharp contrast to black robe and dull-toned background. SC

A decade before Resnais and Robbe-Grillet, Maya Deren -- catalyst and pioneer of the American avant-garde movement -- creates a work that distorts and intermingles past and present, time and place, reality and fantasy until they are seen as a potential or real continuum. An incident becomes the subject of a fearful dream which, in the end, intersects with actuality and destroys the heroine. Throughout, literal time and actual place are abolished, as time is reversed, accelerated or slowed and actions are frozen, condensed, repeated, or expanded. The haunting and mysterious quality of the visuals, the poetic montage and filmic rhythm -- proceeding in utter silence --

create a lasting classic of the international avant-garde, lyrical in character, abstract rather than narrative in structure. SC

THE DESTRUCTION OF TIME AND SPACE

The shattering of old concepts of time and space as structurally separate, absolute categories has found its artistic equivalent not merely in the discontinuities and temporal spatial ambiguities of Joyce, Proust, and Robbe-Grillet, but even more so in the works of modern cinema.

No other art can so instantaneously and so completely expand, reverse, skip, condense, telescope, or stop time, or so suddenly change locale, abolish or accent perspective or distance, transform appearances or proportions of objects, or simultaneously exhibit spatially or temporally distinct events. No other art can within a fraction of a second and with no efforton its part change the audience's viewing position and angle in the most radical fashion, even transforming it from onlooker into protagonist by making it the eye of the camera.

The cinema distorts space and time within shots (by accelerating, slowing, moving toward or away from the action) and between shots (by changing locale or temporal sequence). These "jump-cuts" can be combined with very rapid panoramic shots ("swish-pans") or with totally unrelated action. Instantaneous time travel is possible by flash-forwards or flash-backs. Segments of action can be repeated for emphasis or for the purpose of intentional prolongation, and can be combined with slowed or speeded-up motion. A scene can be viewed simultaneously from different angles, or can be interrupted at will, remaining incomplete or taken up again later; and life can be arrested or frozen.

Far from being a realistic mode of art, the cinema creates an entirely artificial paradigm of time and space. It is the only art form, Cocteau said, that allows for the domination of both time and space. (1) Cinematic time and space are entirely under the filmmaker's control and need be neither contiguous nor continuous.

While in everyday life space has unbroken continuity (even when we change position, it happens by degree), and is "unbounded" (to the limits of our sense organs), filmic space is confined to the arbitrary dimensions of the frame on which an entirely subjective selection of images unrolls. This space, thought flat and two-dimensional, conveys a four-dimensional quality of which time is part.

Though the cinema's ability to destroy time and space had existed from the moment film developed special effects and creative editing, the commercial film industry's emphasis on realism precluded its widespread use. Linear plots, with their clear-cut progressions, required contiguous space and time. When time-condensation or elimination of transitional devices (such as dissolves) was allowed, it was only at climactic moments or so advanced the linear progression of the plot.

The modern film has moved far beyond this. While in Balzac's novels, says Robbe-Grillet, time completed man as the agent and measurement of his fate, "in the modern narrative, time seems to be cut off from its temporality ... it no longer passes, it no longer completes anything." (2) In the discontinuities and incongruities of modern cinema, filmic time again approaches dream and memory; for memory, as Robbe-Grillet points out, is never chronological.

Film is the only medium capable of portraying the Einsteinian space-time continuum and indeed simultaneously constituting its very essence; for the image and its duration can never be rendered separately.

It was Hauser who most forcefully realized the fluidities of time and space as constituting the very essence of cinema; the quasi-temporal character of space, the quasi-spatial character of time. (3)

> **The discontinuity of plot and scenic development, the sudden emersion of thoughts and moods, the realitivity and consistency of time standards, are what remind us in the works of Proust and Joyce, Dos Passos, and Virginia Woolf of the cuttings, dissolves, and interpolations of the film. (4)**

As the classicist form of film changes to the looser and more open structures of contemporary cinema, the distance between the work and the spectator lessens. The "visual field" of the art work (in cinema, the screen) is, as Sheldon Nodelman points out, no longer the primary field in which it displays itself; it expands to take in the entire space between itself and the viewer, a space common to them both. (5) This new fact promotes collusion between victim and perpetrator.

> **Far from neglecting him, the author today proclaims his absolute need of the reader's cooperation, as active, concious, creative assistance. What he asks of him is no longer to receive ready-made a world, completed, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary, to participate in a creation. (6)**

As always, it has been the avant-garde that has pushed these inherent potentialities of film to their very limit. In their shameless desire to possess the medium, they have

creatively desecrated time/space in order to reconstitute it in the glory of their now guilty knowledge of its complexities and uncertainties. Experimentors such as Robert Whitman or the Czech "Laterna Magica" group have attempted literally to destroy the abyss between image and reality (Vertov's, Eisenstein's, and Godard's dream) by combining film with live actors. The Czechs had their live protagonists accompany the film's action or invade it (in one production, a live actor literally jumps through the screen); Whitman creates simultaneity and a life-film continuum by projecting the film on to the actor's body.

And beyond Brakhage, Antonioni, Bertolucci, Richard Myers, Michael Snow, and Warhol -- all of whom, in various ways, intentionally recall us to the role and presence of time -- stand the single-frame animators who give us truth twenty-four times per second. Not to be confused with conventional cartoonists whose images move at a slower rate and in intentionally sequential progression, this total destruction of time and space -- twenty-four different images per second -- reflects the dizzying speed and cubist atomization of contemporary civilization. And even such "final" provocation has already been surpassed in the production of 2- or 3-screen films of this type, projected simultaneously. This sensory overload leads to excited attentiveness, disorientation, and heightened sensitivity.

These magical devices of cinema -- themselves products of this new technological art -- catapult the filmmaker into modernity. He need not, as in conventional cinema, confine himself to orderly progression of clearly defined stories occuring in stable space and normal temporal continuity; the medium allows him to enter 20th century art, to express fully his new insights into the multi- faceted space-time continuum by mingling illusion and reality, past and future, exterior and interior universes.

By so doing, however, the filmmaker is compelled to take the next step. This involves the dissolution of conventional narrative and its reconstruction as an ambiguous, complex web of atmospheric explorations and uncertain progressions towards tentativeness rather than an orthodox happy end.

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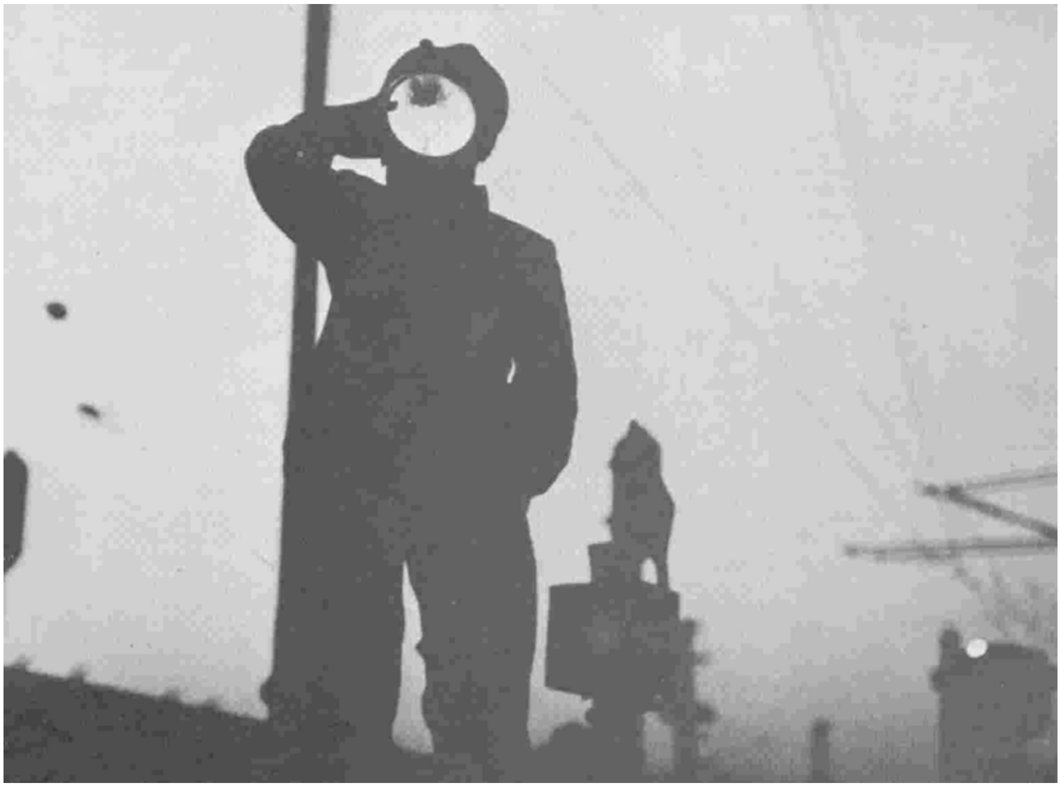


MOSAIC IN CONFIDENCE

(Peter Kubelka, Austria, 1963)

Mystery and alienation; there is reality, yet the effect is abstract, strangely sad. Most astonishing is the reflecting circle that supplants the face; it creates a second level of visual and psychological reality; specific, not mythological as in *Meshes of the Afternoon*.

FILMS

AKTION 540

(Werner Koenigs, West Germany, 1968)

From a near-by balcony, an entire day's activities at an outdoor city market (from morning's installation to evening clean-up) are mercilessly recorded in the space of seven minutes by extreme time-lapse photography. Though tremendously speeded up, action is "continuous" while real time has been destroyed.

CHINESE FIREDRILL

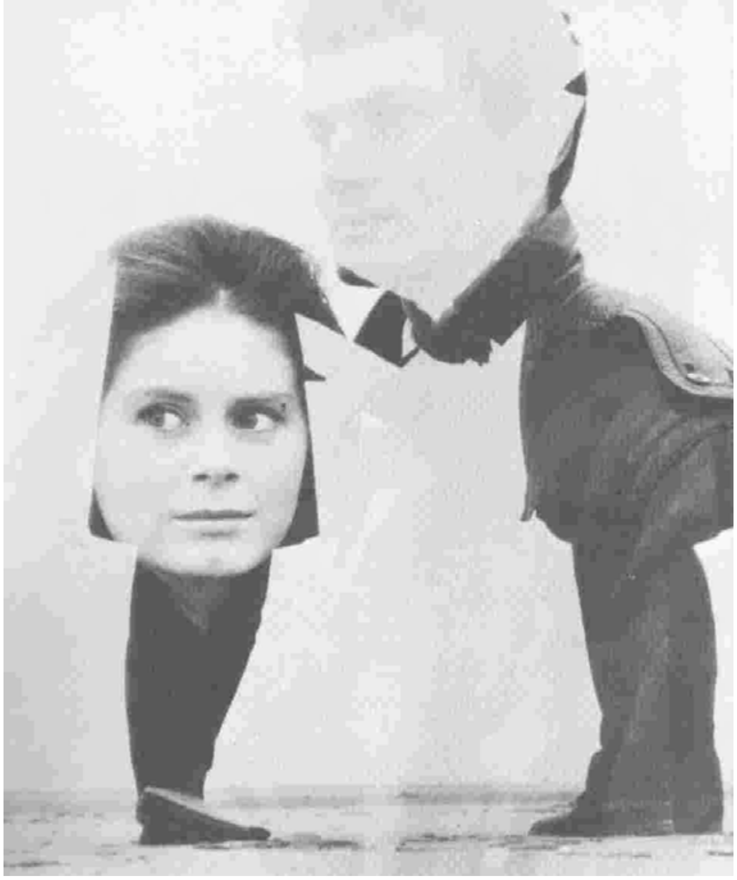
(Will Hindle, USA, 1968)

One of the most technically proficient and talented American avant-gardists creates a claustrophobic, oppressive study of a man in a room or cell or universe. Instead of plot, there are memories, and attempts at order followed by increased anxiety that ends in chaos. Superimpositions of almost identical visuals, freeze frames, dissolves, image manipulation by re-photography, are among the devices used to create the semblance of a private, horrifying world.

THE DOOR IN THE WALL

(Glenn H. Alvey, Great Britain, 1956)

The most elaborate and consistent attempt to change size, shape, and position of the screen within the frame to fit the demands of a given story (here, a fantastic H.G. Wells tale) for atmosphere, tension, and shock. The "Dynamic Frame Technique" is achieved by two sets of movable mattes (masks) controlling height and width of the screen area to be used. A recent use of elements of this technique occurs in Richard Fleischer's *The Boston Strangler* (1968)



MURIEL

(Alain Resnais, France/Italy, 1963) (F)

Resnais' bold determination to express filmically the relativity of time and space, reality and illusion is strangely captured in this poetic superimposition. The couple exudes strength, beauty, and innocence, as young couples usually do; but context and configuration are now fragmented and problematic.

GO SLOW ON THE BRIGHTON

(Donald Smith, Great Britain, 1952)

Stunning application of time-lapse photography literally whips the spectator from London to Brighton at a speed of 800 miles per hour, compressing an hour's journey into 4 minutes. The entire trip is seen, but the camera, positioned in the locomotive's cab, only takes 2 (instead of the usual 24) pictures per second. Since projection is at the customary 24 frames per second, a dizzying illusion of extreme speed is achieved. Authentic "compressed" noise of bridges and overpasses rushing by accompanies the images.

GOD IS DOG SPELLED BACKWARDS

(Don McLaughlin, USA, 1967)

3000 years of fine art in 4 minutes.
In a joyous tour de force, the world's greatest paintings -- all schools, all periods -- flash by at the rate of eight per second; yet we are able to recognize and retain most. Music by Beethoven. "Theoretically, the world's greatest images, combined with the world's greatest music, should produce the world's greatest film." - Don McLaughlin

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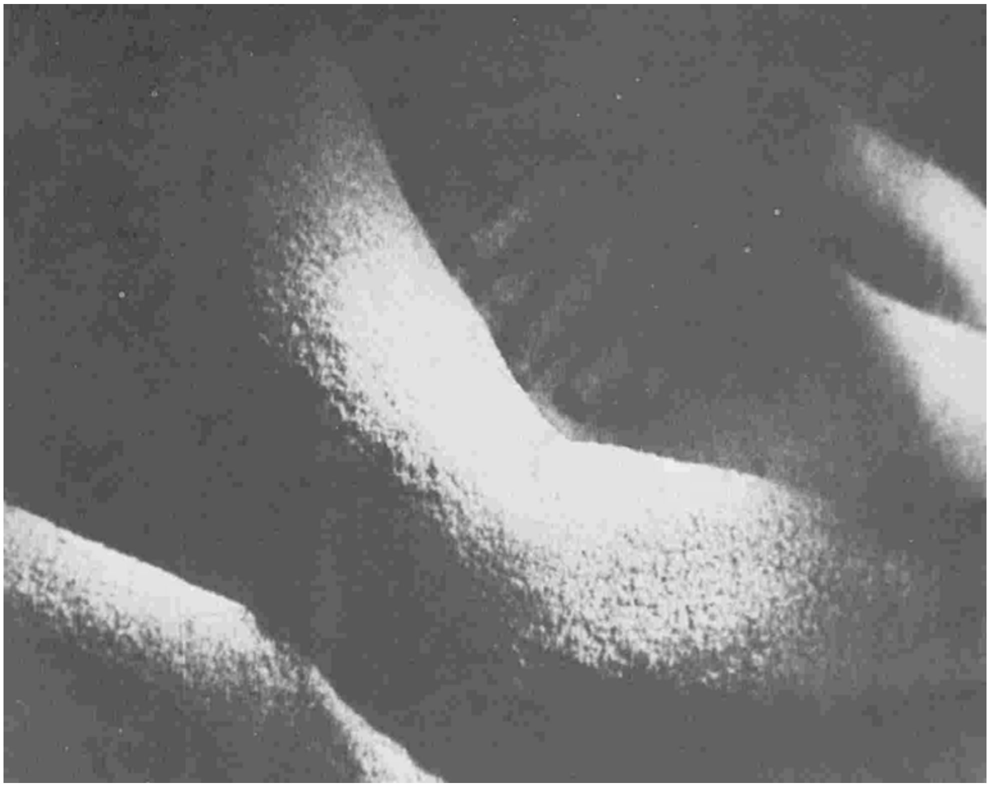


HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR

(Alain Resnais, France/Japan, 1959) (F)

The image is erotic, yet there are other elements; only parts of bodies are shown, the lighting is expressionist, and the lovers -- a French girl and a Japanese in Hiroshima -- seem covered with ashes from the atomic explosion. An image of love in our time.

One of the seminal films of the modern cinema. For the first time a poetic fusion of past and present, of different locales, of complex counterpoint between sound and image is achieved. Particularly memorable is the twenty-minute opening, a poetic documentary on Hiroshima and its tragedy, used as matrix for the talk and memories of two lovers who attempt to relate their individual fates to the collective tragedy of mankind caught in war. The connections between the various themes, as Gavin Millar points out, are made as much by the editing as by the dialogue or commentary. The paradoxes are attained by the stressing of similarities between different time sequences. In fact, montage and time/space linkage -- expressing the essence of the modern sensibility -- are at the core of the film, not (however artful) its excrescence. But it is the deep moral passion of the filmmaker (seen also in his earliest concentration camp film *Night and Fog*) and his bold break with stylistic conventions that mark this as oneof the most original works of the post-war era. The scenario is by Marguerite Dumas.

THE HOUSE (HET HUIS)

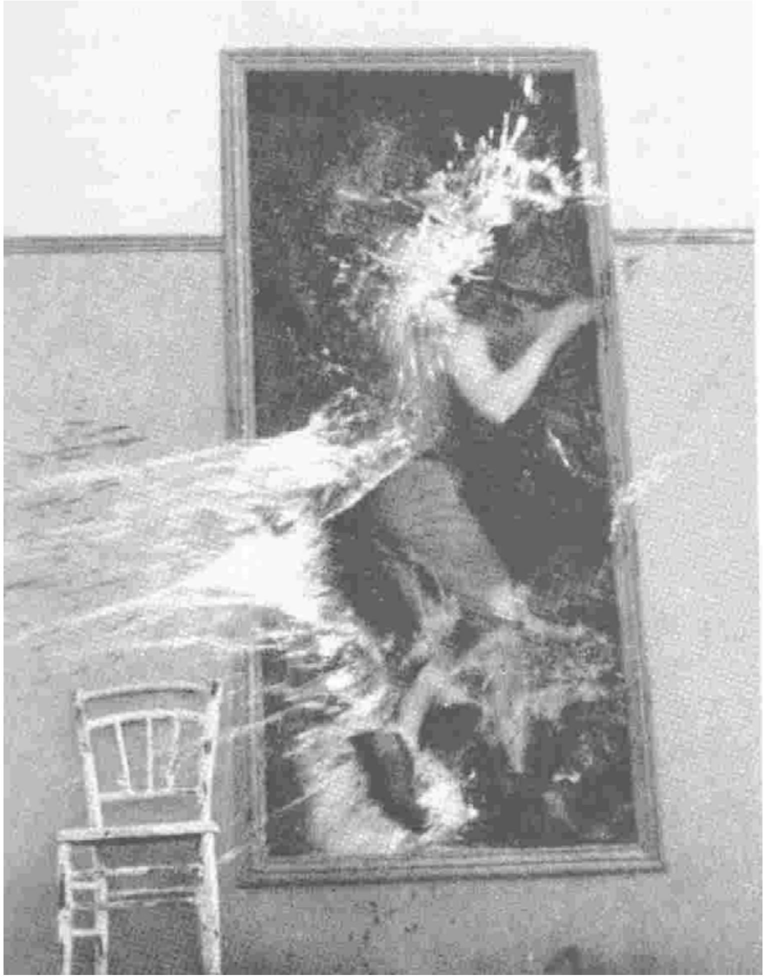
(Louis A. van Gasteren, Netherlands, 1961)

The methodical demolition of a sprawling Dutch mansion becomes the core of an ambitious attempt to fuse past and present in glimpses of the life of three generations presented simultaneously. Continuously disrupted by collapsing rooms and falling walls, half a century of turbulent European history is condensed into a thirty- minute impression. There is no looking back, since time never exists as a fixed point; everything is now.

IN MARIN COUNTY

(Peter Hutton, USA, 1971)

A bizarre comment on American civilization. The total demolition of suburban houses (to make room for a new highway), seen in strongly accelerated motion, transforms the stubbornly charged bulldozers into ominous, devouring monsters.



THE BLOOD OF A POET (LE SANG D'UN POETE)

(Jean Cocteau, France, 1930)

The mythological passage through mirror into another universe -- one of mankind's haunting wish-dreams -- achieved in a visual and poetic metaphor by submersion in water. Our viewing position -- reinforced by chair and wall moulding -- erroneously compels us to consider the "mirror" as vertical. SC

Often mistaken for a surrealist work, this is a carefully constructed, entirely conscious artifact, mingling symbol and metaphor to project the anguish, apotheosis and corruption of the struggling artist. It remains fascinating primarily as an early example of sophisticated time/space destruction for poetic ends. This entails the passing through the mirror into another world, the fantastic combinations of unrelated events in space and time, and its brilliant central metaphor: the dynamiting of a huge factory chimney at the beginning of the work, interrupted in the middle by the film's action and completed only at the end by its total collapse; an intimation that the film represents the equivalent of a one-second dream.

PRUNE FLAT

(Robert Whitman, USA, 1965)

The most fully-realized work of the noted American mixed-media artist -- a desperate attempt to destroy the distinction between film and reality. Live actors perform with and in front of their filmed images which may or may not duplicate, precede, or follow their actions. Most fascinating is the projection of film on the actor's body -- such as nude footage of a dancer superimposed on to her dressed body. The complex orchestrations and inter-relationships create a mysterious, multi-dimensional sensory overload.

POWER OF PLANTS

(Paul F. Moss and Thelma Schnee, USA, 1949)

Fascinating time-lapse film of growing plants lifting weights, breaking bottles, moving rocks, tearing heavy tinfoil, with the camera set to take a single frame per hour for up to 60 days. The resultant film strip, projected at ordinary speed, provides continuous motion and convincing proof of the power of plants. A magical film.

RENAISSANCE

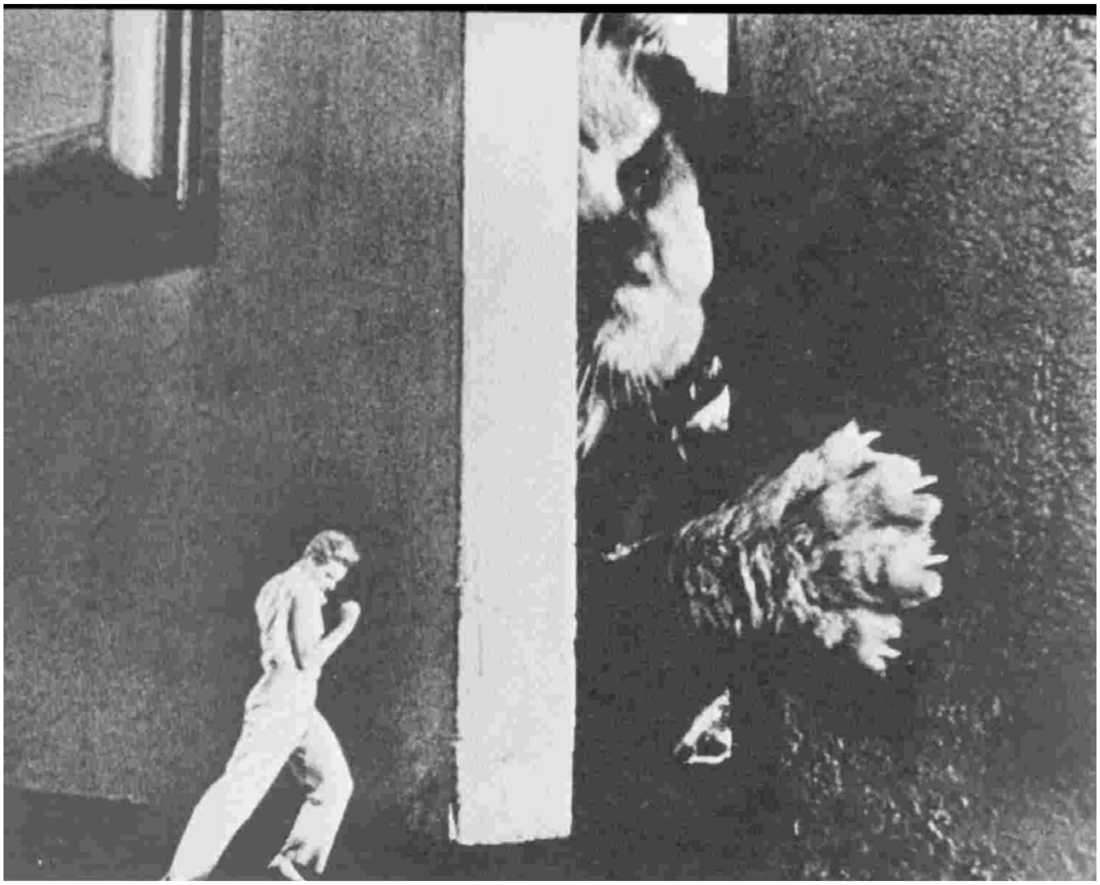
(Walerian Borowczyk, France, 1963)

Animation-in-reverse reconstitutes from the debris of objects a nostalgic, mysterious still-life. The principle actors are the objects, or, more precisely, their movement in space and time. Useless left-overs of different kinds attract and find one another and unite to give birth to a new world of commonplace, magical things. A haunting, disturbing work.

SMOKING

(Joe Jones, USA, 1970)

A man's face; smoke slowly, imperceptively begins to ooze from his mouth. Shot at 2000 frames per second (instead of the usual 24), the simple act of exhaling smoke, expanded by nearly 100 times our normal perception, becomes a huge and endless event.



THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN
(Jack Arnold, USA, 1957)
The eye, drawn to what seems a normal-size cat, instantaneously meets surrealist shock: spatial disorientation, disproportionate object size. Ordinary reality is transformed into a monstrous universe over which man no longer has control, as the protagonist -- forever shrinking -- passes through stages of increasing terror.

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EAT
(Andy Warhol, USA, 1963)
In this famous early Warhol film, the painter Robert Indiana eats a mushroom for 45 minutes. This ordinary act, due to the absence of other plot, becomes an event; and proves that "real time" in cinema (where we are used to condensation) prolongs actions and is almost unbearable. **SC**

THE DESTRUCTION OF PLOT AND NARRATIVE

The dilution or rejection of conventional narrative and straightforward realism is the predominant tendency of contemporary art.

The multi-faceted, fluid nature of reality as now understood can no longer be subsumed in the certainties of linear narrative structures.

Since neither simplistic causality nor terms such as "beginning" or "end" are any longer philosophically tenable, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell a tale.

> **The narrative, as our academic critics conceive it, represents an order, linked to an entire rationalistic and organizing system, whose flowering corresponds to the assumption of power by the middle class ... All the technical elements of the narrative -- systematic use of the past tense and the third person, unconditional adoption of chronological development, linear plots, regular trajectory of the passions, impulse of each episode toward a conclusion, etc. -- everything tended to impose the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe. Since the intelligibility of the world was not even questioned, to tell a story did not raise a problem. The style of the novel could be innocent. (1)**

From Kafka to Beckett, from Joyce to Burroughs, from Proust to Robbe-Grillet, there is an unbroken evolution towards vertical rather than horizontal explorations -- investigations of atmosphere and states of being rather than the unfolding of fabricated plots. In an interview with *L'Express*, (2) Ionesco referred to a play as a structure of states of conciousness and added that there was no longer a story, but rather "a progression by a kind of progressive condensation of states of mind, of a feeling, a situation, an anxiety." This may be another way of saying that -- through modern science and philosophy --art once again returns to poetry and the significance of poetic truth. This truth does not deny the "story" -- it only robs it, as Robbe-Grillet put it, of its character of "certainty, tranquility, innocence". (3)

This mature "uncertainty" -- so much more open to life than the dogmatic authoritarianism of our forefathers -- now also extends to characterizations and motivations of the story's protagonists. The elegant characters created by the older masters of world literature, the "full" explanations of human behavior, the delineations of the character's past, are replaced by dimly-perceived personages whose actions and motives remain ultimately as unclear as they are in real life: we are all enmeshed in knowledge of others or self that is forever "incomplete", forever tinged with ambiguity.

> **A character who can present no convincing arguments or information as to his past experience, his present behavior or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motivations, is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. (4)**

The loss of virginal certainty, however, leads to a more profound -- if more painful -- understanding of man. This mystery was glimpsed by Dostoevski, whose torn, neurotic characters display the fullness (ambiguity) of human nature; their actions are seldom predictable, their motives opaque, but they frequently offer intimations of a larger truth.

Acknowledged by Dostoevski and legitimized by Freud, the admission of the unconscious into our sensibility has forever removed expectations of an "unravelling" of human mysteries. Instead, we have the protagonists of Pinter; even more hermetic and alienated than Dostoevski's. Yet we are moved by their mystery and our certainty that we are like them. And though the end of bourgeois individualism may indeed be at hand, perhaps man (as Shapley and Robbe-Grillet point out from different, yet convergent vantage points) can exchange his shaky monomania for a larger, less anthropocentric conciousness. Film, the most modern of the arts, has not remained exempt from these new developments. Nonetheless, Hollywood still hankers after 19th century style, stories and type-cast stars; after all, *Gone With The Wind*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Love Story* still sell the largest number of tickets.

But both the independent avant-garde and the serious 35-mm directors have been profoundly affected. In the underground (from Man Ray, Richter, and Epstein to Brakhage, Peterson,and Bartlett), plot and character had always been subsidiary to the medium's poetic potential. Even in the commercial cinema, the same trend is evident in Bresson, Godard, Skolimowski, Bertolucci, Fassbinder, and others. Significantly, the attack on plot and bourgeois individualism, initiated half a century ago by the Aesthetic Left (Breton, Eisenstein, Tzara, Bunuel) is thus joined by contemporary Western artists with a different emphasis. But the assault on narrative structures takes yet another, insidious path.

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FILMS

AKRAN

(Richard Myers, USA, 1970) (F)

Myers is unquestionably a major talent of the American avant-garde and *Akran* one of his most important films. A feature-length deluge of incessant, brilliant bursts of images (short takes and jump cuts,

single frames in series, freeze-frames slightly altered between takes) it creates a Joyce-like, dense and sombre mosaic of memory and sensory impressions, a texture instead of a plot, a dream-like flow of visually-induced associations often flashing by faster than they can be absorbed. Described by the director as an "anxious allegory and chilling album of nostalgia", its penetratingmonomania is unexpectedly -- subversively -- realized to be a statement about America today: the alienation and atomization of technological consumer society is reflected in the very style of the film.

ANTICIPATION OF THE NIGHT

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1957) (F)

Light and shadow, sun and moon, dream and color: a daring attempt, by one of the great experimentors of our day, to portray events, objects, the world as they might look to an infant as yet unable to organize his impressions. "Reality" is here broken into a flow of colors and shapes, rushing by in complex, mysterious orchestration. SC

L'AVVENTURA

(Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy, 1960) (F)

With this film -- booed at its initial Cannes presentation -- Antonioni developed the language of the new cinema and entered film history. The old-fashioned plot has gone; as if to spite it, the heroine disappears early in the film, never to be found. To show the empty lives of empty people, there is monotony; and long, repeated, silences, as in life. In fact, with its extreme long-takes in almost real time, the work today appears as a forerunner of minimal cinema. But unlike the latter it is suffused with meaning: the absence of communication, the spurious utilization of eroticism to alleviate loneliness or anxiety, the crumbling values of the elite, the ennui and lethargy of the rich. Space, decor, composition, and environment become integral components of the moral action and a very modern sense of disintegration permeates this major work of the new cinema. SC

EMPIRE

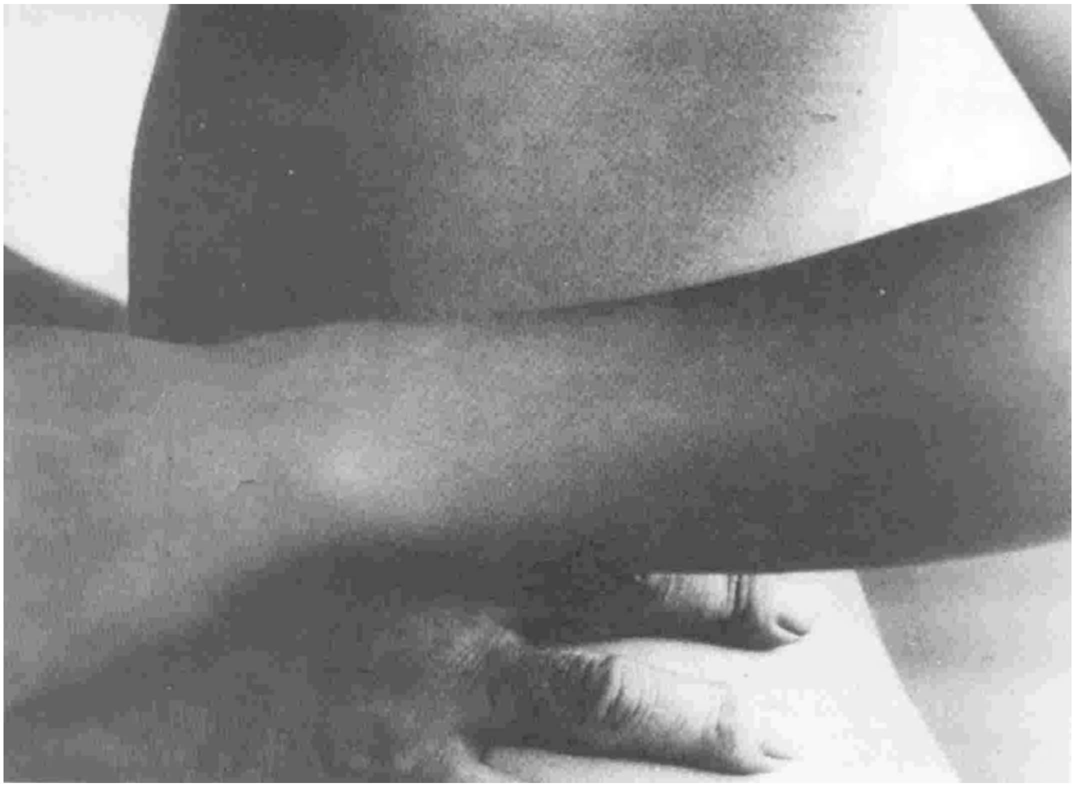
(Andy Warhol, USA, 1964) (F)

An eight hour long film, during which the camera, from one fixed position, uninterruptedly photographs the Empire State Building in real time; an object existing outside us, in its own universe of non-meaning.

DESTROY, SHE SAID
(DETRUIRE, DIT-ELLE)

(Marguerite Duras, France, 1969) (F)

The famed French ideologue of the New Novel and author of Hiroshima Mon Amour creates a hypnotic film about five alienated people isolated in an unworldly hotel. Enmeshed in ritualistic power games, they continuously exchange personalities as each acts out his own ambigious charades. A highly stylized, non-logical dialogue creates enigmatic fear; long, uniterrupted takes and absence of close-ups evoke ennui and distance. At the end, there is a mysterious climax of revolutionary destruction.



THE MARRIED WOMAN
(LA LATER UN FEMME MARIEE)

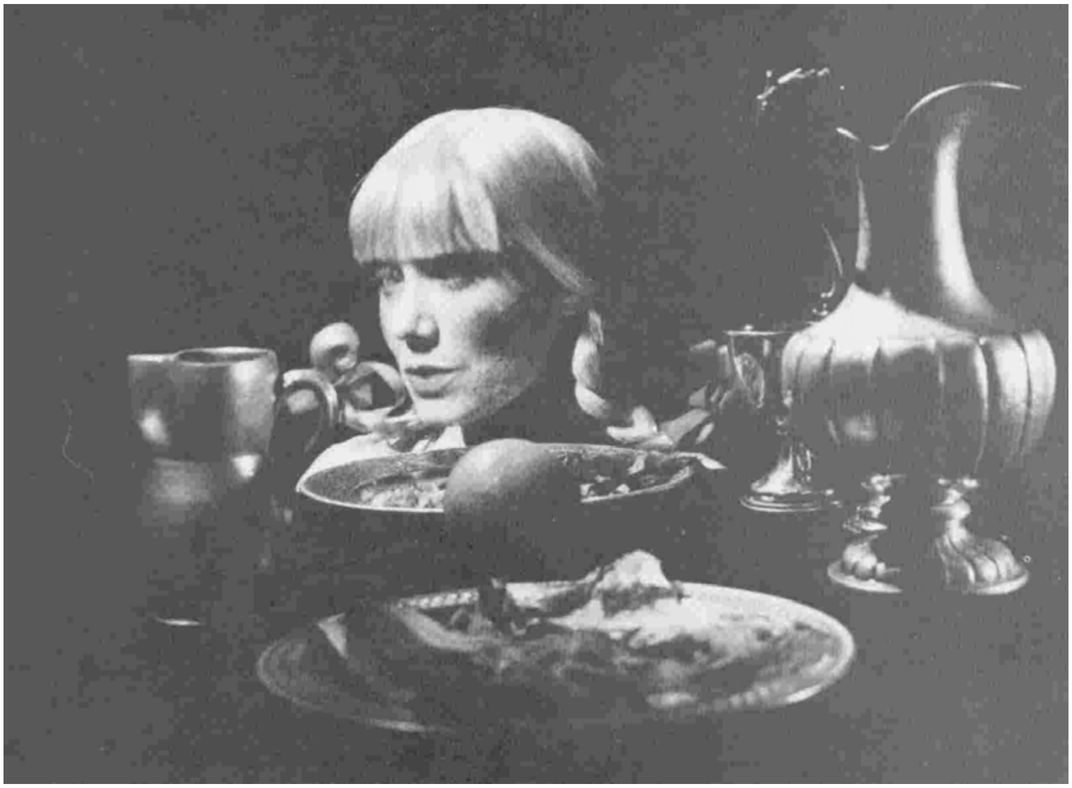
(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1964) (F)

The powerful close-ups of arched, yielding body and the man's possessive, loving hand, posed against white background, reflect Godard's fusing of humanist and minimal cinema. SC

To analyze all the stylistic innovations of this most original director would require separated discussions of practically all his films. The underlying tendency is nevertheless clear; an increasing atomization of conventional cinematic structures in favor of freer, collage-type improvisations. Plot and narrative are subsumed by Godard's preoccupation with the nature of cinema and of reality, his investigations of contemporary problems, ideologies,

paradoxes -- the capturing of modern ambiguities and confusions of hich he is very much a part. The "plot" of *The Married Woman* -- 24 hours with a woman between husband and lover -- is therefore merely a pretext for vertical,in-depth explorations of values, atmospheres, textures; of relation- ships, lies, ignorance of self, sex-as-communication. For audiences brought up on Hollywood, the style, tempo, and content of the film is maddening. Consisting almost entirely of three stylized, intensely beautiful love scenes and seven cinema-verite interviews involving the protagonists, the work swings wildly between extremely long takes (the interviews) proceeding at a painfully slow tempo, and the tightly edited love scenes, composed of individual, 10- to 20-second long tableaux -- beautifully stylized fragments of nude bodies, hand, faces -- separated by sensuous fade or quick cuts. The alternation of tempo between these lyrical, yet fast sequences and the almost Warhol-like interviews (perversely, the usual reaction shots are missing), creates a disturbing dichotomy. Alienation is caused in the love scenes by fragmentation and in the interview scenes by the use of real time. This prevents conventional "identification" with the protagonists, rather compelling the viewer, in Brechtian manner, to ponder the social ramifications of the action; the domination of people by false images, advertisements, slick consumer goods; the alienation of women (if not of man); the need for self-awareness and for true values, so entirely lacking in the film's sensual, empty star.

Also apparent are Godard's preoccupation with the nature of cinematic reality and his insistence on subverting the screen's illusion, constantly recalling us to the artificiality ("created-ness") of what we are viewing. There are even anti-illusionist games: after we have viewed a series of ads in a woman's magazine, the last of these, filling the entire screen as did the others, is suddenly revealed as a huge outdoor billboard by the shocking device of having the heroine unexpectedly enter the frame "in front" of it. Only then is the true size, scale, and nature of the image revealed to us and its "reality" as a newspaper advertisement destroyed. SC



DON GIOVANNI

(Carmelo Bene, Italy, 1970) (F)

The woman's averted glance, harsh light,
enveloping blackness, create disembodiment
and dissociation -- a perfect visual metaphor
for the compulsive, cubist fragmentation
of the opera's conventional plot.

More sombre, controlled and abstract than Bene's earlier work, this is a baroque, ironic and claustrophobic avant-garde "restatement" of the opera's incest episode. Accompanied by Mozart's score, this compulsive, cubist fragmentation of conventional plot in favor of a more profound exploration also utilizes complex, subtle montage, varying from minimal cinema to a sustained staccato rhythm. Bene is reconfirmed as one of the true iconoclastic talents of contemporary cinema.

TOM, TOM, THE PIPER'S SON

(Ken Jacobs, USA, 1969) (F)

This structuralist dissection, enumeration, decomposition and reconstruction of a 1905 Biograph film of the same title provides a painstaking metaphysical exploration of the nature of cinema. Practically every shot and scene of the original 10-minute film is ominously "analyzed" and re-interpreted into a feature-length work by manipulation of image, introduction of slow motion, repetition, freeze-frames, abstracting, and other "subversions" of the original. Shades of Vertov!

VAMPYR

(Pedro Portabella, Spain, 1970) (F)

A most original work, A hallucinatory montage of unfinished, non-consecutive fragments of scenes photographed on the set of a new Spanish version of *Dracula*, this sophisticated homage to the vampire film genre transmutes its visual data into a new poetic reality. The plot of the commercial *Dracula* (though not its eerie atmosphere) effectively disintergrates in this lyrical, nostalgic evocation of its essential elements, refracted by a 20th century sensibility. As irrelevant extras or technicians with smoke machines walk spectrally through scenes of intended horror and become part of Portabella's daring new universe instead of disrupting it, we are suddenly confronted with a brooding reflection on the genre itself -- a memory piece that is also a farewell. SC

LA VERIFICA INCERTA

(Gian Franco Berucello, Alberto Griffi, Italy, 1965)

"A calculated assault upon the supposed logic of the structure of the narrative film. Clips from a dozen or more cinemascope movies, shown still squeezed, follow each other in a perfectly logical but complete anarchic progression. The filmmakers replace the conventional sequence of shots describing a simple action (opening a window, for example) with an equal number of shots, all technically "correct" and all dealing with the same dramatic/functional situation, but which throw the event into total confusion. The hero changes person mid-shot; camera movement reverses halfway through an action; the lighting jumps from phony blue-filter darkness to over-exposed multi- shadowed "daylight"; and the color range (which throughout the movie manages to reflect every imperfection of mass produced color prints) cuts from all-over brown to washed-out blue-green." David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*, 1971

KATZELMACHER

(Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1969) (F)

Stylized, proscenium-type acting by non-emoting stereotypes against chalk-white backgrounds creates a Brechtian attack on the German petty-bourgeoisie. The artist's tampering with film stock itself contributing to the alienating effect.

An early work by one of Germany's best new filmmakers, who -- like Godard whom he quite deliberately emulates -- produces at least two features a year while directing the famed avant-garde Munich Anti-Theatre. Played in proscenium-style by non-emoting stereotypes against chalk-white backgrounds, the film depends less on its minimal plot that on the careful creation of a Brechtian universe to make an intricate attack on the German petty-bourgeoisie, viewed once again as potential prototypes of neo-fascist tendencies. The "actors" appear not as individuals, but as social types, drowned in empty lives and cliched "values". The stifling narrowness of the petty-bourgeois mind has seldom been more penetratingly revealed.

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WAVELENGTH
(Michael Snow, USA, 1967)
A magic moment in a magic film; the strong, spectral sunlight streaming through carefully "placed" windows into the still, mysterious loft through which, for 45 minutes, the camera traverses its eighty-foot length in one continuous, almost imperceptable zoom movement. SC

A seminal work of the new avant-garde and unquestionably one of the most iconoclastic and original experiments of the 60s. This hypnotic, 45 minute long film consists entirely of one continuous, almost imperceptible zoom movement which traverses the length of the 80-foot New York loft. During this time, four tiny "human events", none longer than a minute, occur in front of the camera (such as two people walking in), the rest is painful (to minds attuned to Hollywood plots) poetic contemplation that turns into reverie. A perfect

example of the cinema of stillness, it weaves its charms so subtly that those who come to scoff remain transfixed. A speculation on the essence of the medium and, inevitably, of reality, the real protagonist of this film is the room itself, the private life of a world without man, the sovereignty of objects and physical events. The film is accompanied by a steadily growing electronic sound -- created by the rising pitch of an oscillator working against the 60-cycle hum of an amplifier -- which finally reaches an unbearable level; to Snow, the glissando of this oscillator sine wave is the sound equivalent of the camera's zoom. SC

THE ASSAULT ON MONTAGE

An instructive and sadly amusing commentary on man's attempts to eternalize the necessarily transitory may be discerned in the evolution of film editing. The discovery of a revolutionary new technique, its institutionalization, ossification, and supersession -- all are there, in cyclical progression.

The significance of this first and basic filmic task cannot be overestimated. Cocteau phrased it succinctly: "A director who does not edit his own film, allows himself to be translated into a foreign tongue." (1) Editing was born in 1903 when Porter found it necessary to glue two pieces of film together to develop a scene in *The Great American Train Robbery*.

Initially viewed merely as a helpful mechanical device to maintain continuity, it was quickly discovered to have aesthetic potential as well. Griffith not only intentionally divided a scene into shots, but within it varied distance, angle, perspective, and focus, adding close-up (significant detail) and cross-cutting (simultaneous advancement of different plot lines) to the arsenal of editing.

Following the development of an entire theory of montage by the Russians and its creative utilization by the Germans in its 20s, Hollywood institutionalized what could have been a tool of art into a smooth technique. The result was the establishment of a "mythology of editing", an international canon of regulations scrupulously obeyed by filmmakers and editors, immortalized in text books, and further vulgarized by film schools. These rules were not only "right" -- they were reasonable, logical, the triumph of common sense in the cinema, reflecting an orderly, predictable world within which surprise or shock were kept to a minimum.

It is perhaps impossible to convey how definitive this received canon of editing was regarded as being by the film industry. As usual in human affairs, its historicity was apparent only to rebels. Ultimately it was they who, by challenging the "eternal",

broadened the expressive range of cinema. Having assiduously chipped away at one rule after another, desecration is now complete.

The best-known rule of the canon specified a particular etiquette for the introduction of a new scene; a carefully choreographed ballet of long shot ("objectively" photographed from a distance to "establish" the physical setting of the scene and show the placement of characters within it) to medium shot (drawing the viewer into the action) to close-up.

The rebels break with this: they open new scenes with a close-up or a medium shot, disorientating the viewer into frantic and inevitable attempts at understanding, thereby pulling him into the action more securely. This "jarring" is by no means confined to Bertolucci, Godard, or the underground. It can already be found in such films as Bunuel's *Viridiana*, and is paralleled in the structuring of the modern novel.

There exist traditional devices, according to the canon, for transitions between scenes: fades (to denote time passage), dissolves (to denote action occurring elsewhere at about the same time), iris effects (an opening up or closing down on a scene, for emphasis). The rebels either dispense with these devices in favor of "direct cuts" to subsequent scenes (increasing disorientation and space-time compression) or using them for non-conventional, creative purpose.

In the canon, if transitional devices are not used, adjoining scenes should be spatially or temporally similar to maintain continuity and smooth narrative structures. The rebels tend, on the contrary, to use the direct cut in the manner most calculated to "shock" the viewer into new time and space.

By the book, a shot is not to be ended before the end of action within it or before the viewer can fully grasp it. The rebels instead prefer to increase the mystery.

The worst cinematic crime is said to be the jump-cut -- a false, mismatched cut within a scene, joining two discontinous parts of a continuous action, thereby violating strict continuity. But with Godard's *Breathless*, the jump-cut becomes the hallmark of the new cinema, denoting an acceptance of discontinuity by artist and audience for purposes of heightened imagination, or intimations of memory, passion, or anxiety. It produces high visual excitement, "particularly when the frame remains unmoved and the character is popped about with it." (2)

According to film orthodoxy, size of objects in adjoining shots should be similar and sudden changes in scale are to be avoided. The rebels prefer to increase disturbance.

In photographing a scene, say the rules, the cam-

era must remain on the same side of the action throughout, so as not to disrupt continuity of direction. Since Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, however, this "immutable" law has been under severe attack.

Dialogue, music, or sound effects were supposed to end simultaneously with the scene. However, overlapping sound has now become an editing technique not only for bridging, but as metaphor or counterpoint.

Conventionally, dialogue between two protagonists should cut from person to person and back, with the speaker always visible and the listeners visible at some time; head movements and positioning should be synchronized with camera angles. But Godard's *The Married Woman* -- an excellent example of the new subversion -- contains long dialogue sequences in which the camera remains with one person for almost the entire duration: shots of listeners are missing, head positioning is arbitrary.

An "insert" (a cut-away shot to another action or object) should be used to cover up temporal or spatial discontinuities. This is discarded by the rebels as discontinuity relates to the modern sensibility.

Screen motion (left to right or vice versa in chase sequences, for instance) must be maintained in successive shots. But this, too, is not longer held necessary.

Significant changes in pacing throughout a film (not just at climaxes) have hitherto been frowned upon. However, both Godard and Antonioni, to mention only two, favor alternating slow and rapid sequences within the same film.

According to the canon, even in realistic films real time is invariably (and invisibly) compressed into filmic time. This is rejected by Warhol *et al* in one of the large cinematic revolutions of our day.

It was held that filmic time ought not to be so compressed as to draw attention to itself. Modern cinema has violated this precept with a vengeance; the customary time condensation is far greater than ever before and is accomplished without resort to customary fades, dissolves, and inserts.

Convention demanded that neither tenses nor modes of experience be mixed except by the use of well-defined devices of separation (flashbacks, flashforwards, blurring for fantasy, etc.) But the entire modern school -- with Resnais in the lead -- have successfully eliminated this stipulation, mingling time, illusion, and reality.

In orthodox filmmaking, scenes move forward in orderly, logical progression. This too is rejected by the rebels who repeat certain key scenes for poetic emphasis, intermittently insert brief flash-forwards or memory shots, add subliminal or "extraneous" material, and freeze action within the film to a complete standstill.

By creating masterpieces in strict violation of these established rules, the new cinema has exposed their historical (transitory) nature and asserted itself as a cinema of poetry. Creativity has taken the place of smooth continuity. Lyricism, passion, and romanticism have toppled the (superb) craftsmen of Hollywood. Slaves of the mass market, they dared not break the rules; this required the young, as yet free of responsibility and routine. Said Cocteau: "What one should do with the young is to give them a portable camera and forbid them to observe any rules except those they invent for themselves as they go along. Let them write without being afraid of making spelling mistakes." (3)

If one studies the entire canon of conventional editing technique, the crime most to be avoided has always been that of evident editing; the emphasized cut, drawing attention to montage and such. It is now clear that the entire thrust of the new cinema has been towards the destruction of this false modesty and reactionary (because reality-reinforcing) unobtrusiveness.

Yet the force of illusionism in art (and of man's need for it) is such that even "intrusive montage" quickly becomes accepted as a new narrative "device", tending once more towards invisibility.

The assault on conventional montage, however, has contributed towards propelling cinema away from the petty-bourgeois sentimentalities of Hollywood into our real universe of unrest, uncertainty, anguish.

> **This sense of disparity, disequilibrium, or unbalance which I have called the main theme of Eliot's poetry and Fellini's films, is one of the most important ways in which modern art has voiced its troubled awareness of the disorder of our times. And it is significant that the expression of this sense of disorder should be in the poetically and filmically formed technique of montage, developed in Western countries to emphasize disparity, while its Russian form emphasized conflict. (4)**

A corollary is pointed out by Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar in explaining Godard's unorthodox editing techniques:

> **Successive developments of this action are shown to us as the would strike us if we were spectators in real life. Nothing is prepared or led up to. No "clues" are laid as to imminent**

> action ... We are given no insight, we have no omniscience. We have to accept ... The logic of the author who used to share his knowledge with us is replaced, for better or worse, by the logic of the passer-by who knows as little as we do. (5)

This also indicates, Rod Whitaker notes, the similarities between film and the modern novel which allows the reader to see everything, but, unlike the ubiquitous narrator of Balzac's times, tells him nothing. (6)

Dispensing with compositional stability, narrative clarity, and orderly progression, the modern filmmakers plunge us headlong into unpredictable action, their images forever "ahead" of us, and confront us with mystery as we painfully attempt quickly to adjust ourselves to ever new locales, situations, and plot twists. In the context of the darkened theatre, in which our entire perceived universe consists of a white rectangular space reflecting violent visual events, considerable physiological and psychological shock inheres in the sudden appearance of entirely new environments, huge objects towering over us, extreme changes in scale, transitions too rapid to follow, large movements across the screen, and torrents of images in rapid, continuous succession.

The assault on the old montage is therefore an attempt to strengthen immediacy, to capture the viewer by mystery and intimation, to increase his identification by forcing him into stronger mental and psychological response, thus jolting him from the comfortable safety of his own universe.

But there also exist in contemporary cinema countervailing tendencies, opposed not to the conventions of montage, but to montage itself. This is to be seen in certain experiments of Brakhage and Markopoulos (films "edited" in the camera during shooting, without resort to later montage), in Robert Frank-Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (described by them as "an accumulation of images rather than a selection"), (7) in the radical wing of the cinema verite movement (which aims it leaving reality "undisturbed"). It also includes Godard and Jansco, in their use of lengthy one-shot sequences, early Warhol, and the sepulchral contemplations of the minimal filmmakers. The trend reappears in the attempts at "cosmic cinema" by Belson *et al*, whose films ultimately consist of variations on one continuous image-experience, orchestrated and transmuted not by cuts, but by overlapping superimpositions. Ideological adherents of this type of cinema, such as Youngblood, believe that the resultant simultaneity of (non- dramatic) action, proceeding within a space-time continuum, most accurately reflects, among the various film styles, the era of relativity and that superimposition must take the place of montage. (8) In short, the assault on mon-

tage, in true subversive fashion, seems to come from all directions.

REFERENCES

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(2) *The Language of Film*, Rod Whitaker, 1970
(3) Cocteau (4) *Literature and Film*, Robert Richardson, 1969
(5) *The Technique of Film Editing*, Karel Reisz & Gavin Millar
(also see *A Primer for Filmmaking*, Kenneth Roberts & Win Sharples, 1971)
(6) Richardson (7) Reisz-Millar (8) *Expanded Cinema*, Gene Youngblood, 1970

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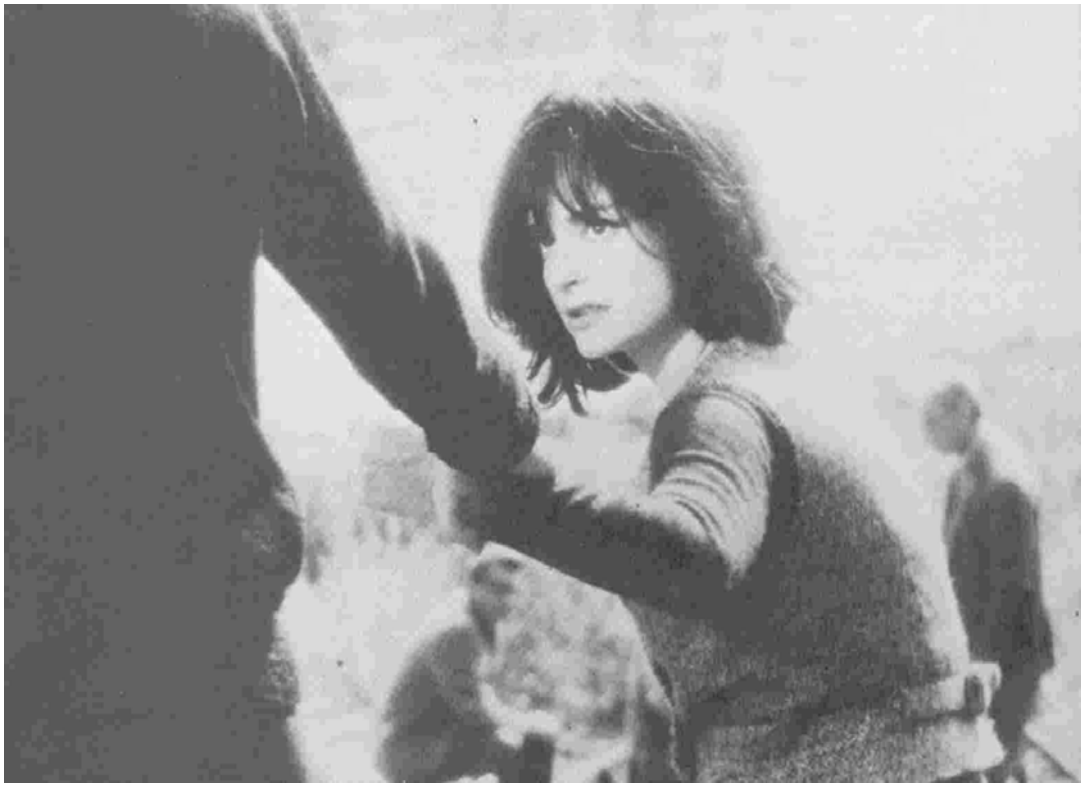


BEFORE THE REVOLUTION
(PRIMA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE)

(Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy, 1964) (F)

Adriana Asti's luminous eyes parallel the positioning of the hero's arm and lead us toward him; the rigidity of her own arm and her facial expression denote resistance; but the lovers do not exist in a vacuum as hinted at or by the background figures, one of whom becomes the sequence's central protagonist.

Rarely has a talent burst upon the film scene with such

brilliance as Bertolucci did with this film, perhaps the most germinal work of the new cinema. A flood of poetic visuals, montage, and sound, it is a shamelessly passionate, intensely personal statement of political and sexual coming of age. Bertolucci's entire oeuvre is permeated by an unresolved tension between a luxuriant, vibrant aestheticism and an attempt at radical, committed cinema. A profound feeling for a tactile, sensuous, pictorial cinema of (radical) form, texture, color, ad composition is balanced by a strong sensitivity to social issues, including the dilemmas of the radical bourgeois in a period of capitalist decline. Unable to escape his class roots, Bertolucci's sensitivity sharpens his political radicalism while blunting it with informed scepticism and ambiguity. The motto that prefaces this film also points to Bertolucci's dilemma: "Only those who lived before the revolution, knew how sweet life could be." (Talleyrand) Thus Bertolucci is at his best describing, with anguished ambivalence, bittersweet episodes of middle-class life -- an evening at the opera, the raptures of young (bourgeois) love, the despair of an Italian aristocrat whose world is being destroyed by capitalist materialism. The red flag and the poisonous beauty of privileged bourgeois existence are the two constants of Bertolucci's work.

What is most original in it, however, is his outrageous and exuberant pictorial sense, his (aesthetically) revolutionary attempt to create a poetic-political cinema by means of audacious, violent editing and visual effects, far in advance of anything the commercial cinema has to offer and surpassing many of the most potent achievements of the international avant-garde. Bertolucci's camerawork and montage are entirely unorthodox, yet infused with a lyrical fluidity and depth of feeling untypical for a contemporary of Godard, Robbe-Grillet, and Resnais. The often handheld camera is in continuous, unexpected motion, and subjective zoom or tracking shots heighten the feeling of immediacy. This authenticity and "hot" involvement is further magnified by editing that fuses brief, disparate closeups -- unmatched in conventional continuity or scale -- into staccato sequences (with large, rapidly moving shapes creating tension within the frame); introduces sudden cuts from longshots to closeups, accompanied by vivid camera movements with or against subject motion in the frame; leaves action incomplete, or continues it in direct cuts that include temporal or spatial lapses; repeates significant acts from slightly different viewpoints; and scrambles time withing seemingly realistic sequences.

BEFORE THE REVOLUTION (PRIMA DELLA RIVOLUZIONE)

(Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy, 1964) (F)

During a discussion of his political doubts, the young bourgeois attempting to be a revolutionist symbolically walks in an opposite direction from a group of Communist marchers. Bertolucci's entire work is permeated by an unresolved tension between a luxuriant aestheticism and an attempt at radical cinema.

BREATHLESS (A BOUT DE SOUFFLE)

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1959) (F)

The modern cinema could not exist without this film. Godard's first feature, it influenced an entire generation of filmmakers and permanently changed existing notions of what films had to look like. For into this largely irrelevant story of a petty gangster and his American girlfriend, Godard infused not merely the paradoxes of a restless, ironic, existentialist outlook on life, but also a style of narrative and pictorial representation that corresponded to it. So pervasive has his influence been since then that *Breathless* today begins to look "conventional". Its initial impact, however, was shocking: Godard had dispensed with the smooth and logical continuity of the Hollywood film, with its careful "matching" of successive shots, its use of transitional devices such as dissolves and long-shots to "establish" new scenes, its inching, by cautious degrees,

to the center of action. Instead, Godard's narrative style was "disjointed", restless, electrifying; it "jumped" times and space, cut together different locales or events without a single dissolve, and telescoped action by showing only its most important segments. Together with an almost constant use of a mobile camera, these methods seemed stylistically to incorporate the syncopated, explosive rhythms of modern life, the philosophical underpinnings of a universe now recognized as relative.

The same sensibility is expressed in his handling of character and storyline. Unlike the wise and benevolent author of old, taking the audience into his confidence, Godard simply exhibits mysterious, not fully drawn characters whom -- as in life -- we are asked to decipher. The clues more often than not are insufficient, the motivations clouded, the communications guarded (or perhaps sincere). "Order" and "logic" -- in plot progression, editing, composition -- have vanished into the fog of the contemporary world view, with director, actors, and audience picking their way into the unknown. Prototype of the assault on conventional editing. *Breathless* was nevertheless only the first station on the long path of Godard's subsequent transgressions of cinematic convention. **SC**

THE CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH (CHRONIK DER ANNA MAGDALENA BACH)

(Jean-Marie Straub, Germany, 1967) (F)

Utmost economy of means, a feeling of stillness, concentration on a single point: a perfect representation of the spirit of this "minimal" work. The director's refusal to move the camera, condense "irrelevant" action or create "artful" compositions is an assault on our cinematic value systems.

This uncompromising forerunner of structural cinema is an attempt at factual and moral authenticity. It constitutes a "perverse portrayal of a musician (through the eyes of his wife) as if he lived today and was not yet famous, a rendition of his music on the original instruments and without interruption, a refusal to reshape the actuality of a life by the introduction of narrative or dramatic elements. The inherent illusionism of the screen is further destroyed by repeated visual presentation (and reading) of historical documents and letters. The refusal to move the camera or render the image more interesting and an insistence on real time (particularly during the frequent musical selections) represents a frontal assault on the cinematic value system of the spectator.

TOUCH OF EVIL

(Orson Welles, USA, 1957) (F)

Partly recut by the producers, unaccountably underrated by the critics, this remains one of Welles' most original works. His abiding fascination with power and its corruption is here transmuted into a baroque thriller of manic intensity. Claustrophobic, hypnotic, excessive, the work reeks with moral putrefaction, cynicism and a humanism which is pitiless and anti-sentimental. A sordid tale, it subversively shows innocence to be ineffective against evil, goodness to have a club-foot, rationalism to be inadequate in an irrational world. The evil cop (Welles) frames a downtrodden Mexican, who is not innocent, as we had hoped, but guilty. The world of this film is not ordered or predictable, but fragmented and atomized; the brilliant visual style both reflects and creates this reality. Nullifying the old rules of montage, it places the viewer in the position of being always "behind" the cascading images and action. No "explanations" establishing shots, or orderly progressions are provided; instead, direct cuts between scenes (or continual changes of camera setup during them) constantly shifts locale, action, and viewing position. The spectator is whipped from scene to scene, never certain of his bearings, thus experiencing the film "forward" in its evolution toward an as yet unknown denouement. Very aware of plastic values and spatial relationships, Welles keeps his camera moving constantly, suddenly introducing new objects into the frame, tilting angles, photographing most of the film from below for emphasis, editing the soundtrack into a babble of overlapping voices -- sometimes purposely unintelligible, sometimes used in counterpoint. The film's opening sequence -- a masterpiece -- startles by its classicism of style and incongruity of subject matter: within a single, unbroken, amazing "take" of several minutes' duration, the camera swings over roofs, buildings, streets, masses of extras, moving vehicles and passing livestock, in a continuous snake-like movement of increasing, finally unbearable, tension. At its start, we had observed a timebomb surreptitiously being placed in a car, subsequently entered by an (unaware) couple and slowly driven to the border control station, frequently stopped by traffic. We fearfully anticipate the scene's end, and the old master does not disappoint us.

TWICE A MAN

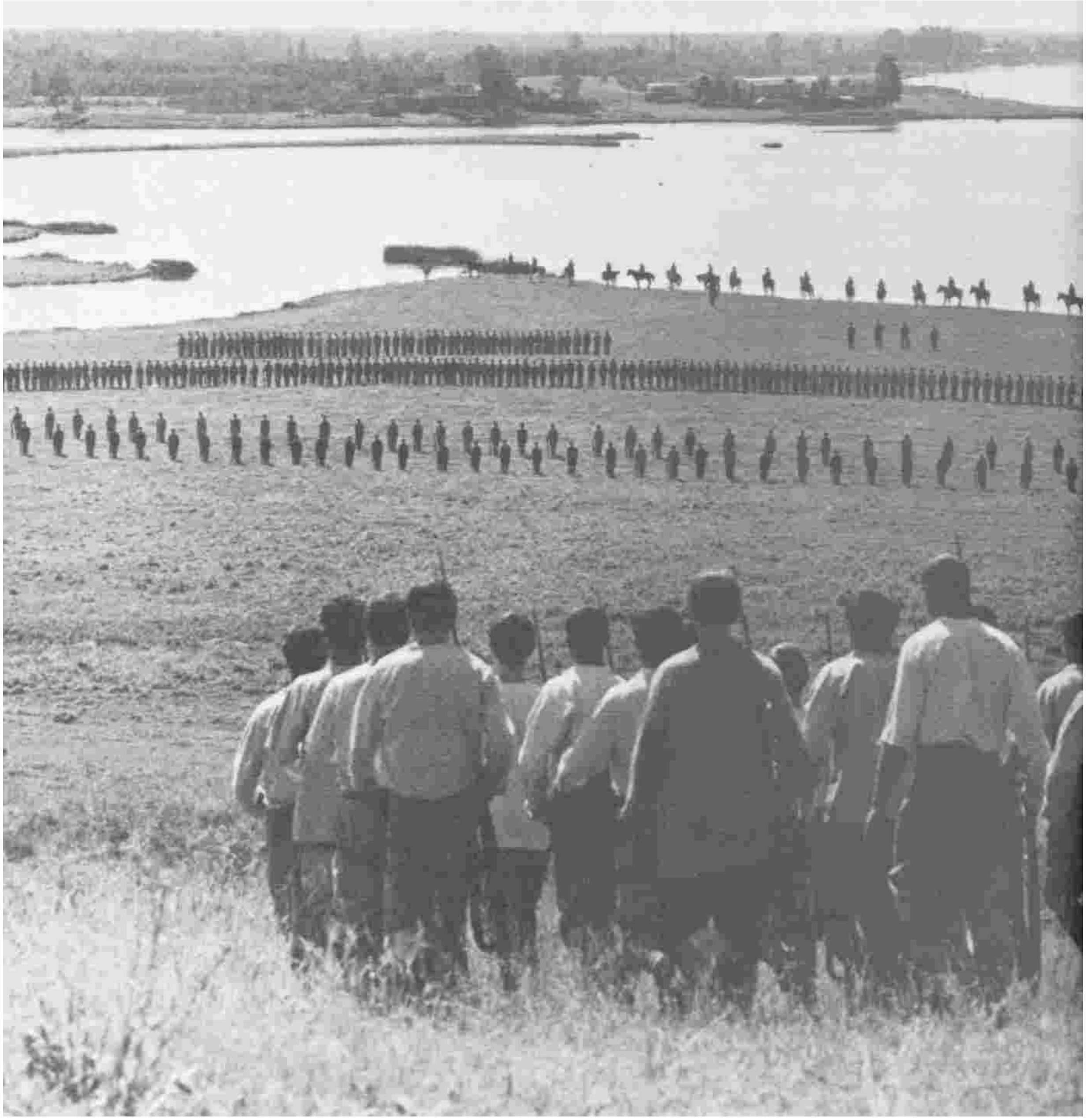
(Gregory J. Markopoulos, USA, 1963) (F)

A modern recreation of the legend of Hyppolytus subtly reveals homosexual and incestual motives among its three protagonists as it mingles reality and memory. Particularly noteworthy is the attempt to portray thoughts and flashes of memory by inserting bursts of single-frame, almost subliminal shots into the main sequence which proceeds in different time and space.

THE RED AND THE WHITE (CSILLAGOSOK, KATONAK)

(Miklos Jancso, Hungary, 1968) (F)

One of the most surprising works from the East; this is a beautifully photographed, stylized drama of the Russian civil war in which neither Reds nor Whites are stereotypes and only war is evil. There is little conventional editing: the entire film consists of long uninterrupted "takes", with the camera in constant choreographic movement through the action, circling or following the protagonists. In an absurdly pastoral setting, an implacable, confused charade of executions, captures, and vengeance is acted out by both sides, with shifting fortunes constantly transforming hangman into victim, victim into hangman. Great plastic beauty and a poisonous lyricism permeate this ballet of violence, its nameless men trapped in hypnotic, archaic rituals, its proud or violated women appearing as symbols of fleeting life. Based on themes from Isaac Babel's works, this is a fully realized paraphrase of the human condition.



THE RED AND THE WHITE
(CSILLAGOSOK, KATONAK)
(Miklos Jancso, Hungary, 1968) (F)

Conventional editing disappears in a film of less than 25 uninterrupted, single-shot sequences with the camera in constant choreographic movement throughout the action. Compositional grandeur characterizes this confrontation of the implacable White Army (significantly in dark uniforms) and the more "human" Reds (in shirt sleeves). The juxtaposition of man and landscape is extraordinary.

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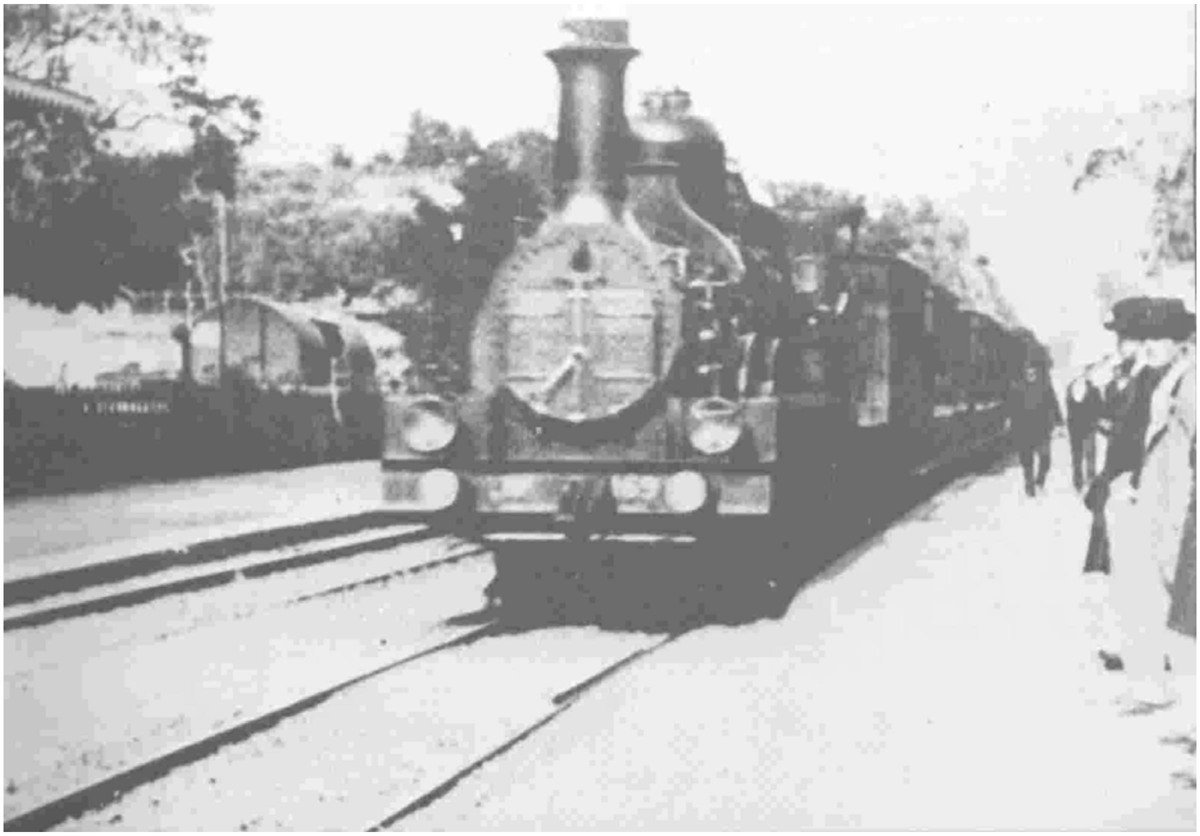

THE ARRIVAL OF A TRAIN IN THE STATION
(Louis Lumiere, France, 1895)
The use of "real" (not condensed) time; an immobile camera; a tiny event -- definitions of both minimal and earliest cinema. Lumiere's 1895 train cause a riot as it neared the spectators, proving the relativity of the tabooed image and its emasculation by exposure and familiarity.

THE TRIUMPH AND DEATH OF THE MOVING CAMERA

THE CAMERA MOVES

The transformation of film from surrogate theatre to visual

art occurred when the camera began to move. Until then, the cinema's full potential could not be realized; an immobile camera, in the fashion of a theatregoer, stared at a proscenium beyond which the action of the photo-"play" took place. Movement was confined to the actors and their constant regrouping in theatrical space.

The liberation of the camera proceeded in stages; first, (though remaining fixed) the camera changed position between shots, bringing the action closer to or removing it from the viewer. This for the first time violated what had previously been considered an absolute distance and set the stage for an intricate (at first liberating, ultimately stultifying) orchestration of establishing-, medium-, and close-shot. A further step consisted of the development of mechanical devices (special vehicles, cranes, rails, flexible tripods for pans or tilts) to change camera position.

Though the camera had "moved" in Griffith and, according to James Card, in William Adler's *The Second Coming* (1915), (1) It was Karl Freund's moving camera in F.W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) and E.A. Dupont's *Variety* (1925) that served as harbinger of a revolution which -- with the development of montage -- transformed cinema into an art form.

Fluidity of camera, its elaborate, choreographic movement within the frame, have since become symbols of creative cinema, offering immediacy, authenticity, and a sense of physical participation which the immobile camera could not match.

In addition to "composing" by editing after shooting had been completed, the film was now also created in the camera. Entire episodes were developed in continuity, without cuts, fades, or titles, and with the camera itself moving to interpret or follow action or perhaps more importantly, to express feelings. Complete sets were constructed to allow for the camera's passage.

An important later advance came with the development of hand-held, lightweight cameras (with portable, synchonous sound). Nothing surpasses this camera's capability to produce intimacy and involvement, particularly in sequences of tension or drama, in cinema verite studies (where the bulkier older equipment had precluded even relative privacy), and in the subjective explorations of personal reality by underground filmmakers.

The apotheosis of the moving camera came in works such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), an almost 90 minute film consisting entirely of ten-minute "takes" during which the camera moves incessantly while all editing has been abolished; this technique has also been used in Miklos Jancso's work, usually consisting of less than 15 "takes" without cuts, the camera in continous choreographic motion.

The concept of the moving camera is more closely associated with the

visual filmmakers and the avant-garde (both independent and commercial) that with the earnest craftsmen of the large studios whose mandate was to produce safe entertainments within a matrix of pseudo-realism. To move the camera is a revolutionary act. It introduces an element of "hotness", instability, emotional entanglement, and implicit anarchy. A period of social imbalance and unrest (from the twenties on and as yet unresolved) characterizes its emergence; and it is the high-strung outsiders or critics of bourgeois society -- Antonioni, Godard, Bertolucci, Brakhage -- who use it more than the Fords, the Wylers, or the many Hollywood artisans, content with the stability exemplified by the fixed camera.

Any movement of the camera -- even if the scene portrayed is immobile -- sets up a tension more powerful (because confined to less space, amidst darkness) than the act of moving one's head; for the invisible world-center behind the camera is the Self, and any motion of this center (be it gradual or sudden, linear or irregular) sets up a basic disturbance of the system. This is why camera movements paralleling, moving towards or away from action are so much more intense than the same action shot by a fixed camera.

It is particularly the travelling shot (forward movement into the action, with viewer as camera eye) that transports us into the life of the film in a dream-like manner, as we literally feel removed from our seats and propelled into the frame to be driven in a car with traffic and trees coming toward us, hurtling down in rollercoasters, personally attacking the enemy.

There probably exists no other effect in cinema as powerful as a rapid zoom at a climactic moment. It is a personal attack at close range, hurtling the viewer without prior warning into horror or revelation, or cruelly separating him from the action. Since identification and authenticity have been considerably augmented by equating the viewer with the camera eye, his trepidation or anxiety increases as well, since the outcome of (his!) drama is "as of the moment" uncertain.

The patterns of tension resulting from these invisible forces within the frame create, with montage, the true reality of a film's impact, of which the spectator (responding to plot, acting, decor) remains largely unaware while being profoundly affected subconciously.

MINIMAL CINEMA

Considering the effectiveness of these instruments of subconcious subversion and their utilization by the most modern filmmakers, it is significant that a counter-revolutionary subversion of the moving camera has recently been initiated from within the avant-garde itself.

A shift in emphasis began to surface in the movement in the early 60s. Until then, their attack on time, space, and narrative had assumed the

shape of subjective, poetic explorations of the subconcious and of states of mind; but with Warhol -- at first considered an eccentric outside the mainstream of the avant-garde -- a new stage was reached which by the 70s had become part of a significant trend in contemporary experimental film.

Subversion is now directed against content or meaning as such; only the work of art "itself" -- its structure and methodology -- is declared worthy of contemplation or analysis. (2) Variously referred to as minimal, structuralist, and conceptual cinema (or, by less sympathetic critics, as the cinema of creative tedium), the spectator is now deprived of the last props of psychological support. Instead, he is asked to observe motionless objects in real time (often for minutes on end), compositional patterns or anti-illusionist deformations of the image, the repetition of purposely meaningless shots or situations that have been entirely drained of anecdotal significance. In short, he is confronted with the often tiresome, yet strangely stimulating portrayal of an unedited reality, in which film time equals real time, silence is as significant as speech, and tiny details, because of the absence of larger events, acquire unexpected importance.

The primary characteristic of most minimal cinema is the use of a fixed camera photographing real time. In Ken Jacobs' *Soft Rain* (1969), a camera "stares" out of a window onto a street for about nine minutes (actually, a three-minute segment repeated three times); nothing is staged; there is no editing, no camera movement; reality flows by, Zen-like, and is recorded. The image is mostly still, except for a few cars and pedestrians; these become events. There is no aesthetic reason for the film to last nine minutes instead of ninety; its "form" is the unstructured matrix of reality.

A similar pattern, with variations (such as mechanical camera movement along a fixed axis), can be found in many minimal films. This combination of fixed camera and real time is possibly the most difficult for audiences to accept or to endure; for nothing is more oppressive in cinema than real time.

Unexpectedly, the unedited flow of real time fails to provide a greater semblance of reality, but instead increases awareness of the work's artificiality. The film "as such" calls imperious attention to itself. Slowing all experience to a minimum (unlike easily accented moments in real life when "nothing happens"), it nevertheless rivets our attention "in the hope" that something will transpire; for even here we realize, subconsciously, the presence of a calculating artist.

By force of negative example the minimalists have made us aware that almost all other films progress in greatly condensed "film" time; by the introduction of real time, they compel us to experience objects, events, and duration in all their purity

and self-sufficiency. The reductive process increases the significance of the few objects remaining and reintroduces us to the importance of the small event or gesture.

An extreme example of "real time" was to occur in Warhol's intended filming of *The Bible*. Each page of an actual bible would appear on screen, in turn, for a period long enough to allow for reading. Several years later and undoubtedly aware of Warhol, cable television now projects push-button ordering of books from an electronic library, based on home-set reception at the rate of a page a time, with the viewer signallingwhen he wishes to proceed to the next page.

It will not do to view these new concerns of contemporary filmmakers as empty aestheticism. Too many artists of note (not merely in cinema) are involved and the movement -- however it may abhor being linked to history and revealed thereby as but a stage in its unfolding -- even has antecedents: Lumiere and his fixed camera, at the very beginning of cinema, observing workers leaving a factory in real time; constructivist enquiries of the 1920s into the nature of artistic creation; Yasujiro Ozu's massively humanistic works of stillness, each scene shot with a fixed camera; the single-frame or film-loop experiments of Robert Breer in the 50s. There are even parallels in the music of Cage, the choreography of Cunningham, the happenings of Kaprow, and the impassive and neutral explorations of objects and surfaces in the *nouveau roman*, disturbingly progressing in real time.

If there is "meaning" in these works, it lies, as Youngblood suggested, in the relationship of work and beholder; "The subject of the work is its own structure and the concepts it suggests." (3) The silent contemplation forced upon us by this art throws us back on to ourselves. It engenders, as Susan Sontag notes in a perceptive comment on the philosophy of the movement, "a stare" and allows no release from attention. The spectator approaches it as he does a landscape, which does not demand his "understanding". Much of contemporary art, Sontag suggests, aspires to this conceptual attitude through strategies of blandness, reduction, "deindividuation", and "alogicality".

This "aesthetics of the inventory" -- the enumeration of events or scenes that are without meaning, as in early Warhol or Robbe-Grillet -- confirms the inhumanity of things, their impersonality, their indifference to and separateness from human concerns. (1) With Robbe-Grillet, the world and its objects quite simply "exist":

> **Around us, defying the noisy pack of our animistic or protective adjectives, things are there ... any meaning we impose on them reduces them to the role of tools. Let them lose their**

> pseudo-mystery, their suspect interiority,
> the "romantic heart of things." (Barthes) (6)

But although the works of the minimalists have unquestionably produced some of the most provocative and subversive film experiences of the last decade,one nevertheless cannot escape their somber symbolic "content" (however this may contradict the presumed "neutrality" of their efforts): the feeling that mankind, in its specifically contemporary form and within the matrix of a declining civilization, is reaching the end of the road. True, the structuralist stance -- by the very resoluteness and extremity of its purist position -- is opposed to the *status quo* and its false blandishments; yet the total draining of human concern or emotion (not to be confused with a call for propagandistic art) seems to denote the growing dehumanization of art. Sontag, though strongly sympathetic to the movement, realizes this unspoken component when (poignantly, and as a friend) she both endorses the radical potential of artists such as Grotowski, Duchamp and Beckett while somehow deploring the historical situation responsible for their rise:

> The myths of silence and emptiness are about as nourishing and viable as might be devised in an "unwholesome" time -- which is, of necessity, a time in which "unwholesome" psychic states furnish the energies for most superior works in the arts. Yet one can't deny the pathos of these myths ...
>
> These programs for art's impoverishment must not be understood simply as terroristic admonitions to audiences, but rather as strategies for improving the audiences experience. The notions of silence, emptiness and reduction sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc., which either promote a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or confront the artwork in a more conscious, conceptual way ... Perhaps the quality of the attention one brings to bear on something will be better (less contaminated, less distracted) the less one is offered. (7)

By placing the movement within a firm historical framework, she thereby denotes both its significance and its limitations.

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FILMS

THE CAMERA MOVES

LA REGION CENTRALE

(Michael Snow, USA/Canada, 1972) (F)

In a primeval landscape, the filmmaker, like a mysterious spaceman, sets up the technological and programmed movements -- vertical, elliptical, horizontal, or combined -- of a camera mounted on it, which for the next three and a half hours explores every last stone of the landscape from a fixed position. There is no sign of life.

THE LAST LAUGH
(DER LETZTE MANN)

(F.W. Murnau, Germany, 1924) (F)

This revolutionary masterpiece of the silent cinema completely dispenses with titles, telling its story

solely in visual pantomime and with a moving camera so fully integrated with action, and sets that entire sequences develop in continuity, uninterrupted by cuts. With Karl Freund's camera mounted on special mobile vehicles or swinging cranes, the sets were constructed so as to allow both camera both camera and action full and continuous movement throughout. The camera -- integral component of the work -- swoops, rises and zooms, goes through doors and windows, anticipates, follows or interprets action, becomes the spectator of unfolding events, or the protagonist. If film had previously been composed after shooting (with a static camera). The worldwide impact of this film proved that a new method of pictorial narration had been developed, transforming film into a fully-fledged, visual art form. It took the sound film and, particularly, the word-bound Hollywood entertainments many years to undo the achievements of this pioneering work.

RUNNING SHADOW

(Robert Fulton, USA, 1971) (F)

An extraordinary example of a work entirely based on a constant camera movement. A soaring third-conciousness exploration -- in purely visual terms -- of the shapes, and patterns of nature, in which camera tilts, upside-down shots, single frame and trucking shots at great speed register not as gimmicks but as structurally determined components of a visual poem. Here, at last, is a prototype of the new space-time continuum on film.

RED SONG
(MEG KER A NEP)

(Miklos Jancso, Hungary, 1972) (F)

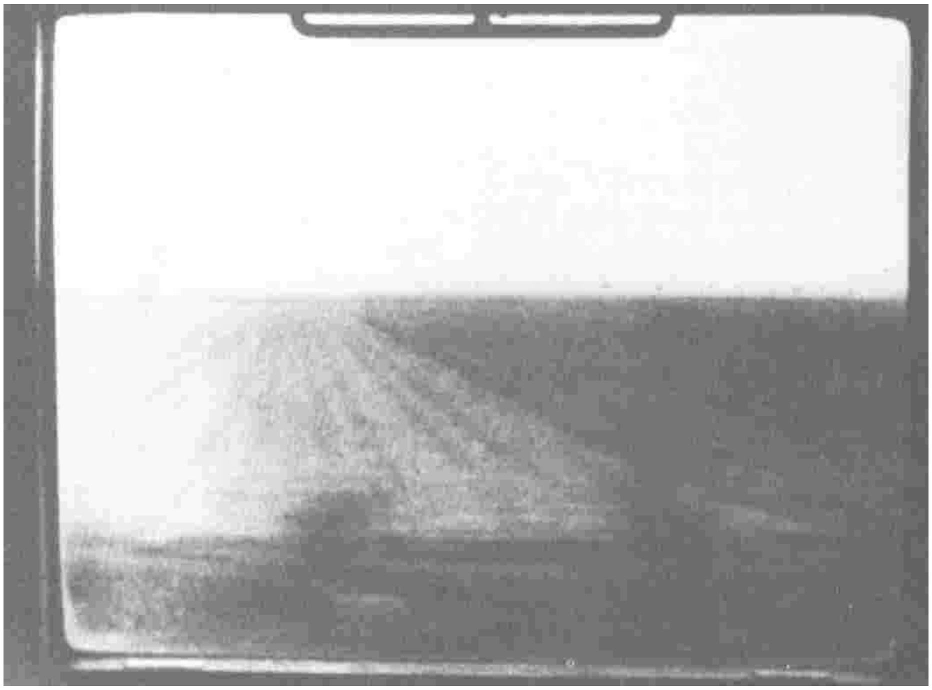
The 1972 Cannes Best Director prize went to Miklos Jancso, who should have received it years ago. In this recent work -- a choreographed portrayal of an abortive Hungarian peasant revolt of the 19th century -- Jansco has reached the apotheosis of his style and theme: the constantly shifting relations between opressed and opressor, the role of violence in human affairs, the necessity for eternal revolutions and (perhaps) eternal repression. Here the theme has become totally abstract -- a cinematic ballet created by a constantly moving camera (single takes, without editing, until the film runs out), constantly moving actors, flowing into each other against a background of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary ritual, chants, and mass ceremonies. While this film represents the most prefect fusion of form and content yet achieved by Jansco, its subversive aspect seems muted and subsumed by a curiously abstract, left-wing romanticism.

VARIETY
(VARIETE)

(Ewald Andre Dupont, Germany, 1925) (F)

Together with Murnau's *The Last Laugh* -- shot by the same outstanding photographer Karl Freund -- this film represents the apotheosis of the moving camera. A melodrama of music-hall life, produced at the end of the expressionist era in German cinema, this relentless work owed its huge popularity with audiences and critics alike not merely to its open affirmation of sensuality (promptly weakened by censors in several countries) but also to the unprecedented fluidity with which its ever moving camera wove into and out of the action. Aided by sensuous dissolves, fluid transitions, and unusual angles, it "saw" everything, including a profusion of smallest details, transformed into huge screen events. More than just telling a story, it presented it from the subjective viewpoint of a particular protagonist. In this Dupont superseded, as Kracauer realized, the conventional realism of the past by capturing the psychological processes below the surface.

MINIMAL CINEMA



RAILROAD

(Lutz Mommartz, Germany, 1967)

From inside a train, a fixed view of a passing landscape, repeated every thirty seconds for sixteen minutes. Hypnotic or numbing, depending on who you are.

From inside a train compartment, the stationary camera presents a fixed view of a passing, monotonous landscape, repeated by the filmmaker every 30 seconds for 16 minutes. Monotonous train noises and the repetition of "irrelevant" action create a hypnotic effect.

COLOR FILM

(Standish Lawder, USA, 1971)

This is a fine example of pure minimal cinema: the camera faces a projector, through which endless strips of blank film pass forwards and backwards in rapid rhythm, first in red, then in other colors. Intermittently, the names of various colors flash on to the screen, not synchronized with the colors of the film. There is no meaning or message; the film exists purely for itself.

A FILM
(UN FILM)

(Sylvina Boissonnas, France, 1969)

A young woman -- Miss Boissonas -- sleeps, walks, lies, or sits at the bottom of a huge metal cylinder which fills the entire screen. The camera, in a fixed position throughout, is suspended from above the cylinder along its central axis and points downwards. There is a hole at the bottom and side of the cylinder, from which water or sand sometimes flows to submerge the young woman who remains passive throughout. For minutes on end there is no action; she is either immobile or changes position only slightly. No camera movement occurs during the 13 "scenes". The "events" of this provocative, oppressive example of minimal cinema repeat themselves. The film is circular and has no temporal progression. Its minimal form becomes a metaphor of the human condition.

KISS

(Andy Warhol, USA. 1962)

Audiences generally titter, then fall into private reveries whenever this film is shown. For here we witness a basic human act in all its subtlety, fervor, and boredom, as for 60 minutes hetero- and homo-sexual partners exchange passionate, superficial, deep, short, extraordinary kisses. An immobile, passive camera records the evens in real time; the result is simultaneously arousing and numbing. Warhol acts as anthropological observer of alien territory; by concentrating his pure and blinding focus on the everyday, he makes it visible and significant. SC

NAISSANT

(Stephen Dwoskin, Great Britain, 1967)

For fourteen minutes, the camera shows the troubled face of a young girl. The purpose: not to tell a story but to involve the viewer "in the moments of a person". Through subtle, non-verbal communication, certain of her feelings and fears are intimated; the film's real time allows -- indeed, compels -- us to consider them more closely and to "think with her".

PARTICLE REMOVAL SERIES

(David McCullough, USA, 1972)

"First in a Series" from the (imaginary) Visual and Spatial Research Center, this study consists of five one-minute episodes, in close-up and introduced by titles: 1) Glass Fragment (step-by-step removal from wound by pincers, in real time); 2) Fingernail Dirt; 3) Wooden Sliver in Hand; 4) Debris Between Toes; (5) Glass. At the end, there is visual recapitulation and re-identification of each item. The dead-pan elevation of the commonplace to the plane of detailed awareness leads to audience agitation, laughter and applause (upon successful removal).

ON A MOST BEAUTIFUL MEADOW (IM SCHONSTEN WIESENGRUNDE)

(Peter Von Guten, Switzerland, 1968)

At 12:45 each day, the Swiss radio congratulates elderly couples on their wedding anniversary. In this film -- while we listen to a full, five-minute rendition of the old Swiss folk song "On a Most Beautiful Meadow" -- we see Mr. and Mrs. Leo and Adele Marti-Schlaefli of Fahrenstrasse in Breitenbach, Canton Solothurn, today's celebrants, in their living room. They sit on a comfortable couch, looking at us seriously. They do not speak, nor do they move, except imperceptively, involuntarily. The camera remains in a single, fixed position throughout. There is no interruption in what is being recorded. The film proceeds in real time -- five minutes is very long. We see and study -- in terms of who we are -- this well-fed, solid and steadfast couple who have spent so many years together, growing into what they are today. We see and study the furniture and decor that have been important to them for so long.

RUNAWAY

(Standish Lawder, USA, 1970)

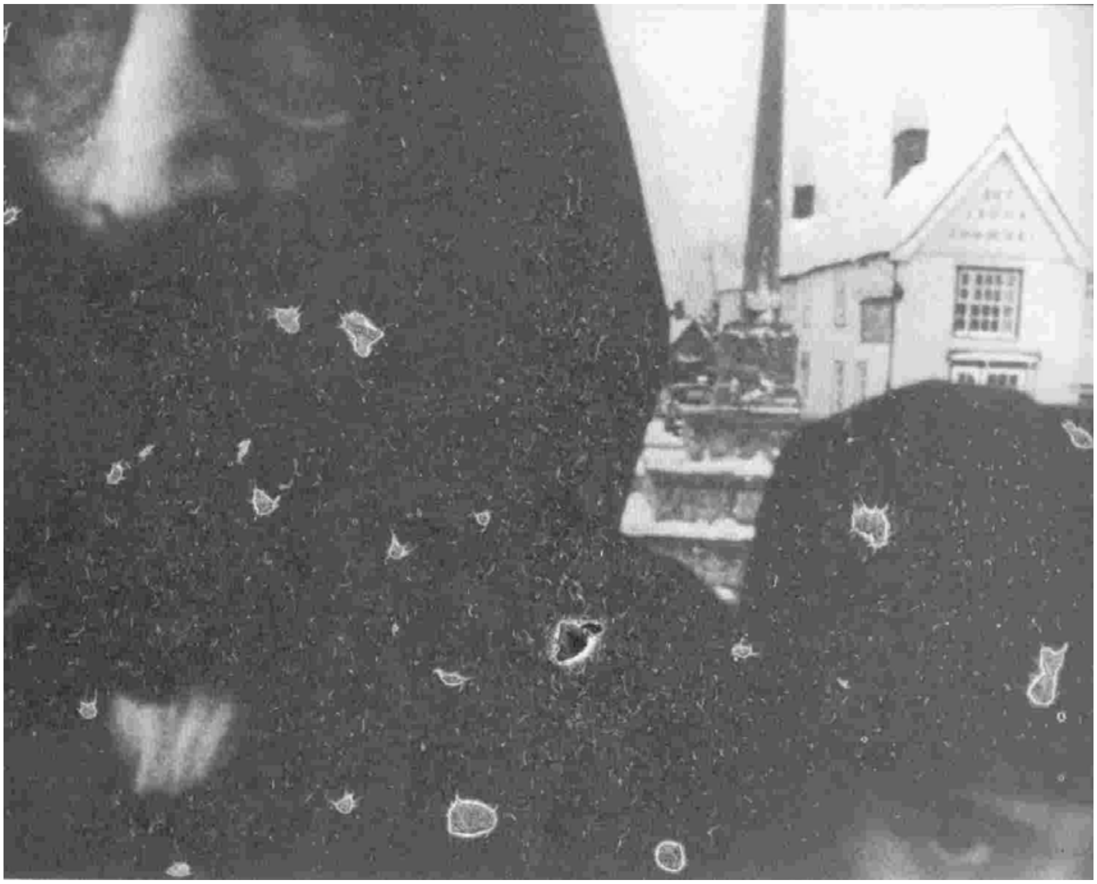
This is an example of minimal cinema "with a purpose". The filmmaker takes a brief scene from an old Hollywood cartoon in which running dogs, deflected by an unseen obstacle,

pull up short and stop; by transforming this scene into a continuous loop, the action is compulsively repeated, the dogs running endlessly to and fro, while the image itself is further manipulated and degraded ("I showed the film in Washington once and someone in the audience called it the most savage indictment of American foreign policy he had ever seen" - Standish Lawder)

SLEEP

(Andy Warhol, USA, 1963-64) (F)

In this most famous of the early Warhol films, a man is seen sleeping for six hours in real time. For long periods, there is no action and the "weight" of unstaged reality seems unbearable, but then there are "events" -- small movements, a shifting of the body in sleep -- that suddenly acquire new import and meaning by the infrequency of their occurrence and absence of other actions. We realize that we witness something neither acted for our benefit nor planned in advance, but existing for itself, carrying no ideological burdens beyond the passage of time and movements of masses recorded within it; the film is robbed, as Robbe- Grillet so well understood, of symbolic or metaphoric meaning. Warhol is the most consistent of the minimalists, exposing us to the full measure of real time in cinema by the sheer length of his films; compelled to look at less for a longer period, we see everything more clearly though perhaps not more deeply. Lucy Lippard is right right to pose the question whether in our era of visual overload by bad television, bad art, and bad political speeches. Warhol's return to visual simplicityand stark expressiveness of gesture is not more powerful. **SC**



APOTHEOSIS
(John Lennon, Great Britain, 1970)
Bundled up and bisected by the frame, John and Yoko are left behind, as the camera, attached to a balloon, literally rises to the heavens. The use of real time includes a 4-minute passage through a cloud band; the screen is blank.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

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SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
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THE DEVALUATION OF LANGUAGE

Film purists have always been suspicious of the spoken word, considering this a threat to the very essence of a visual art. If one recalls the endless number of Hollywood films that can comfortably be viewed with closed eyes, their suspicions were certainly not ill-founded. More significantly, their concerns also relate to trends in contemporary thought and science.

The disenchantment with rationalism, the rise of a visual culture, the vulgarizations of the mass media, the deceptions practiced by those in power -- these have contributed to a growing disenchantment with language as a means of perception or cognition, of intellectual or interpersonal discourse. There are too many words everywhere; they have become empty, deceptive. Far from clarifying matters, language is seen as a means of concealment in human affairs, business and politics. In this regard, as in others, we seem to be approaching Orwell's 1984 well ahead of time. In its use of deceptive language, "democratic" America ("waging peace" in Vietnam, subjecting it to "protective reaction strikes") is no different from "totalitarian" Russia which invaded Czechoslavakia to "liberate" it.

Simultaneously, non-verbal areas of practice and knowledge in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and symbolic logic constantly expand, with computer science entirely based on non-verbal symbols.

> **Mathematics probably gives an image of the perceptual world truer to fact than can be derived from any structure or verbal assertion. All evidence suggests that the shapes of matter are mathematical. The space-time continuum of relativity, the atomic structure of all matter, the wave-particle state of energy are no longer accessible through the word. It is no paradox to assert that in cardinal respects reality now begins outside verbal language. (1)**

Goffman, Birdwhistell and Ruesch have revealed universes of non-verbal communication more "truthful" than our ritualized verbal exchanges corrupted by defense-mechanisms.

In art, Steiner relates the retreat from realism to the retreat from

language: language, at the center of intellectual and emotive life, is always equated with reality. From Rimbaud and Mallarme to Joyce and Proust, from Breton and Beckett to Robbe-Grillet and Burroughs, the artist has attempted to break away from the tyranny of syntax and conventional language in order to allow for the unconscious, to express the simultaneity and unity of time and space, and to return, as Artaud understood so well, to magic and incantation: "The theatre should aim at expressing what language is incapable of putting into words. My principle is that words do not mean everything and that by their nature and definining character, fixed once and for all, they arrest and paralyze thought instead of permitting it and fostering its development. I am trying to restore to the language of speech its old magic, its essential spellbinding character." (2)

Martin Esslin describes Ionesco's use of language as subversive; in an attempt to revitalize fossilized forms, he employs veritable shock tactics; "Reality itself, the conciousness of the spectator, his habitual apparatus of thought -- language -- must be overthrown, dislocated, turned inside out, so that he suddenly comes face to face with a new perception of reality." (3)

And the "meaning" of abstract, abstract-expressionist or conceptual paintings, sculpture and music can no longer be expressed in words: "Most valuable art in our time has been experienced by audiences as a move into silence (or unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility)." (4)

Finally, says Steiner, confronted with the apocalyptic terrors of our century, the artist falls silent. As with Adorno who believed poetry no longer to be possible after Auschwitz, Steiner feels that Beckett is haunted by a similar insight and strains towards silence: "The writer, who is by definition master and servant of language, states that the living truth is no longer sayable." (5) He continues with a chilling parable by Kafka: "Now the Sirens have a still more fatal weapon than their song, namely their silence. And though admittedly such a thing has never happened, still it is conceivable that someone might possibly have escaped from their singing; but from their silence certainly never." (6)

And this silence is subversive.

> **Art itself becomes a kind of counterviolence, seeking to loose the grip upon consciousness of the baits of lifeless, static verbalization, presenting models of "sensual speech" ... Silence, administered by the artist, is part of a program of perceptual and cultural therapy, often on the model of shock therapy rather than persuasion. (7)**

It is from the confluence of such factors that modern filmmakers have begun either to use language in a new way or dispense with it altogether. It is appropriate that such efforts should culminate in a visual medium, particularly capable of revealing insights that cannot be verbally expressed. Godard, Resnais, Antonioni, Schroeter, R.W. Fassbinder, and others now use language in film selectively, in counterpoint, semi-abstractly (as does Ionesco), preceding (or following) action instead of accompanying it; or, similar to music, as poetic, associative innuendo.

And silence begins to invade the stream of dialogue or narration. For words, Susan Sontag points out, weigh more, become almost palpable, when punctuated by long silences. Thus dramatic, avant-garde, or cinema-verite filmmakers retain silent passages in dialogue scenes or interviews, a device rendered more powerful by our unconscious acclimitization to continuous word-noise in television (possibly the most language-ridden, anti-visual medium now in existence.) Leading avant-gardists such as Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage resolutely banish all sound from their works, contributing significantly to the "visualization" of new poetic universes; Michael Snow, Tony Conrad, and Scott Bartlett use only synthetic or electronic sound effects; and some commercial commentators use entirely wordless sequences. Antonioni does this at the end of *The Eclipse*, a visual montage of city streets and street furniture, as does Bergman in *Persona* and *The Silence*, in which the frequent absence of sound heightens the hypnotic power of the ominous visuals. It is the international avant-garde -- ever the champion of visual cinema -- which has most consistently eliminated language in the post-silent era.

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SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

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LIFE WITH VIDEO
(William Walker, USA. 1972)
A TV personality, without leaving the set, makes very personal contact with a willing viewer, finally disappearing into her (via a ladder). Being told, in a muffled voice, that he will now be with her "always", she moans voluptuously, her confusion between TV and reality complete. Do we not all wish for similar confusion?

STRAINING TOWARDS THE LIMITS

THE ELIMINATION OF REALITY

A beautiful and true story is told of the abstract painter Frank Kubka. In the course of a walk, he apologized to nature for having attempted to copy her and promised not to do so again. (1)

There have always existed in the plastic arts tendencies towards forms and images undefiled by representations of reality. This can be seen in Neolithic abstractions, Egyptian designs and Indian patterns, Byzantine artifacts and Renaissance concerns with structure and design. In our day, having removed reality from the image, attempts are being made to remove the image itself.

In 1898, the young Munich *art nouveau* architect August Endell foresaw this:

> **We stand at the threshold of an altogether new art, an art with forms which mean or represent nothing, recall nothing, yet which can stimulate our souls as deeply as only the tones of music have been able to. (2)**

There could be no better definition of the aims and aspirations of abstract art. It was an art, as Herbert Read wrote, that was to echo basic laws and structures of the universe, "liberated from the tyranny of appearances"; an "objective" investigation of colors, shapes, lines, and visual rhythms in order to create force patterns capable of evoking emotions and feelings.

Elements of three tendencies converged in abstract art; the surrealist and dadaist heritage expressed in abstract shapes related to the subconcious (Arp, Miro, Klee, the Eggeling-Richter films *Diagonale Symphonie* and *Rhythmus 21*, and Jackson Pollock's "automatic painting"): the romantic realism of Gauguin, Matisse, and the Fauvists which led to the "hot", sensuous abstractions of Kandinski; and the cubist attempts to reduce objects to their essence, which connected Cezanne, Picasso, and Braque to the "cool", meticulous abstractions of Mondrian.

It has proven difficult to maintain the objective stance of abstract art in practice: even the simplest lines exude psychological vibrations or else come dangerously close to symbolism. Piet Mondrian found it entirely "comprehensible that some abstract artists have objected to the name Abstract Art. Abstract Art is concrete and, by its determined means of expression, even more concrete than naturalistic art." (3) And it was Rudolf Arnheim who called non-objective patterns "the very elements of visual comprehension, the building stones of the composition the artist creates in order to represent the structure of the world in the way his temperament makes him see it". (4) It is thus possible to refer to abstract artists as the true realists of our technological period, who, far from retreating from the world, have merely stepped back for a fuller view. But reality came under attack in other ways: the cubist "reduction" extended to collages of found objects and photo montages, cut up and degraded until reality was atomized or no longer recognizable.

FOR EXAMPLE

(S. Arakawa, USA, 1971) (F)

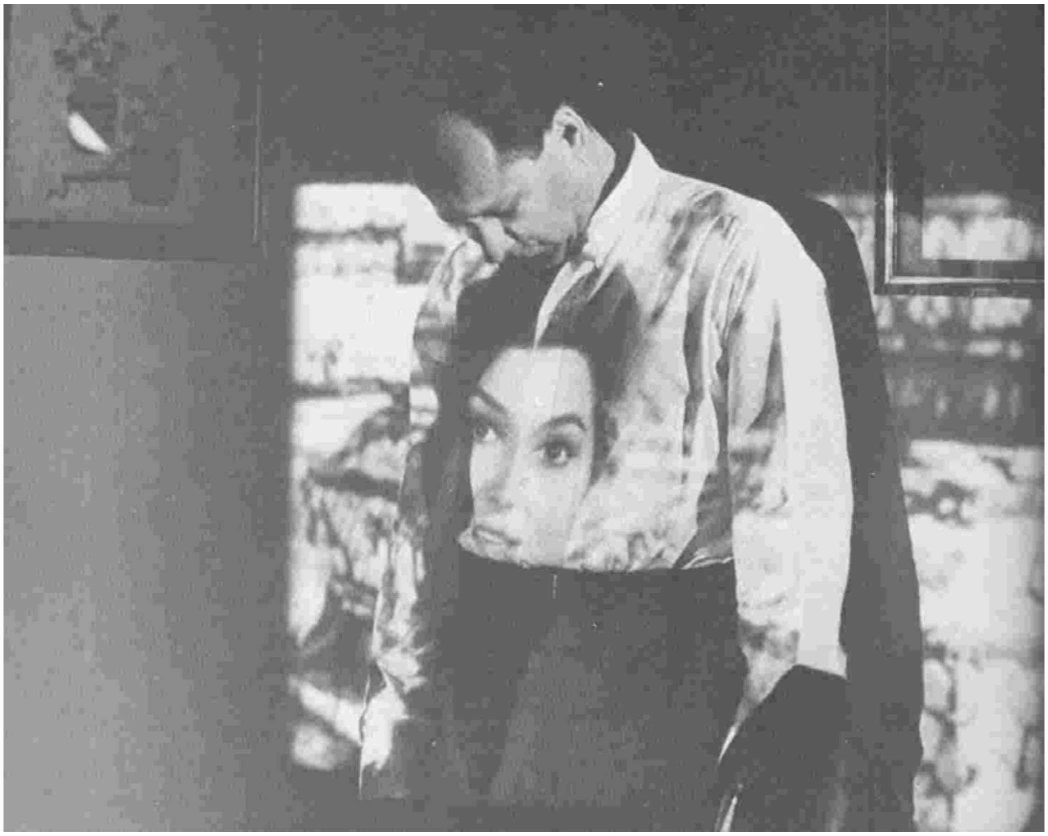
A feature-length documentary of a boy drunkard, photographed on New York's Bowery, as a coldly detached camera records his daily life in the streets. Does it matter if he is "real" or "only" an actor? There exists, says the filmmaker, a child such as this somewhere and his life can be documented before he is found.

This work by Arakawa, the Japanese conceptual artist responsible for *Why Not*, is equally original and even more subversive. Here reality itself -- the truth of the image -- is insidiously called into question. Feature-length, this is a coldly objective record of a 7-year-old child derelict, totally alone, living as a drunkard on New York's Bowery. The ruthless yet compassionate camera

explores his world, often in oppressive "real time", following his every degradation and defeat (including his attempts to stop indifferent passers-by) until a traumatic, catatonic seizure in a telephone booth; a searing, terrifying sequence. But the metaphysical twist is still to come: the documentary is not a documentary, the child drunkard "only" an actor. But, says Arakawa, there exists a child such as this somewhere; hence his portrayal in real streets of such blight that they resemble cityscapes destroyed by war, is "true": "This is a willful switch from the documentary as a 'truthful' account to a new form, one which employs the weight of evidence, the pace of reality only as an impetus or format for the onset of a cinema of investigation,an investigation which the filmmaker has willed to exist. As such, it is as much a new reality as a new "story".

THE SUBVERSION OF ILLUSIONISM

If the arts subvert by providing "illusionist" representations of revolt or perfection, there is no reason why the illusion of art cannot itself be subverted. It is here that the structuralist cinema of our day makes its most disruptive contribution: it forces the artwork to reveal its own superficiality, drawing our attention to its hitherto jealously concealed, "fraudulent" character. Vertov's *The Man With a Movie Camera*, with its manipulation of different levels of reality, may have initiated this in cinema; the contemporary structuralist avant-garde continues it. In their works, we often see the real photographer and his equipment, actors "stepping out of role" to address the audience, clapboards and mikes, academy leaders, splice marks and sprocket holes, in direct violation of the illusion of film space.



VIRGINITY

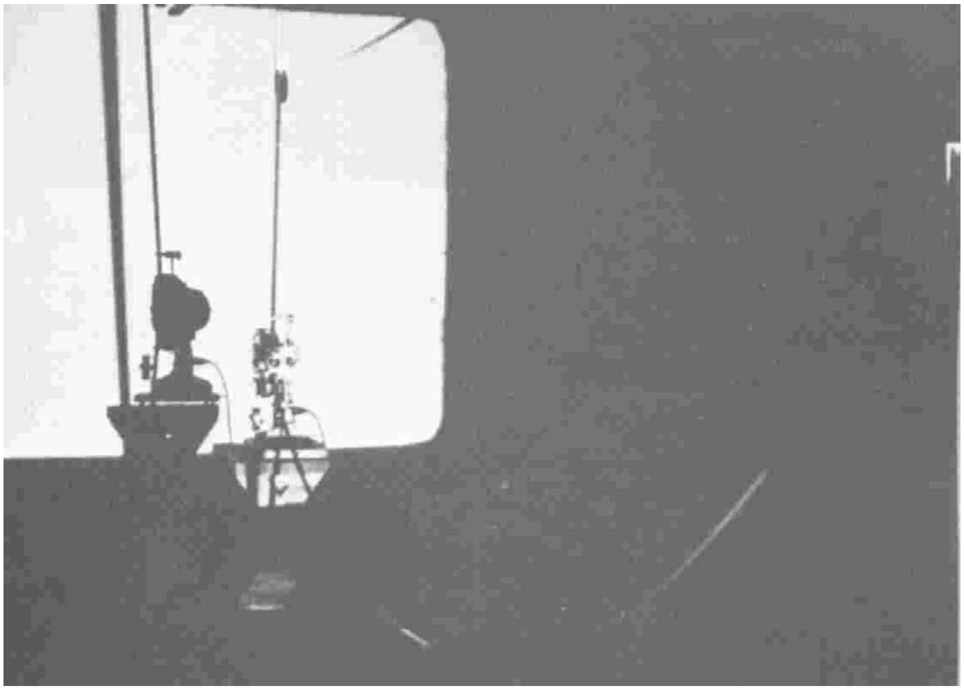
(Roberto Rosselini, episode in *Rogopag*, Italy, 1962) (F)

The "reality" of the flat, two-dimensional screen -- secret repository of our deepest dreams -- is here revelled in by a love-struck man who projects moving images of his beloved onto his body and attempts to caress them; but films come to an end and there is pathos in his unrequited, twice removed passion.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE IMAGE

The silent cinema -- entirely dependent on images -- created works of sublime visual intensity: it was perhaps inevitable that subversive artists of our day should attack the notion of the image itself.

Contributing to this trend has been the increasing incursion of brief (then longer) scenes of darkness or light into experimental films, accompanied by sound or, more potently, silence: extreme pop-art collages that shred reality into fragments: and the preoccupation of abstract artists and minimalists with vision and pure light. The elimination of the image in the films of Kubelka, Sharits, and Conrad has led to the study of light as the "subject" of art, paralleling investigations of pigment and surface in conceptual painting. But by robbing a visual art of its visuals, these artists are revealed as subversives.



DEAD MOVIE

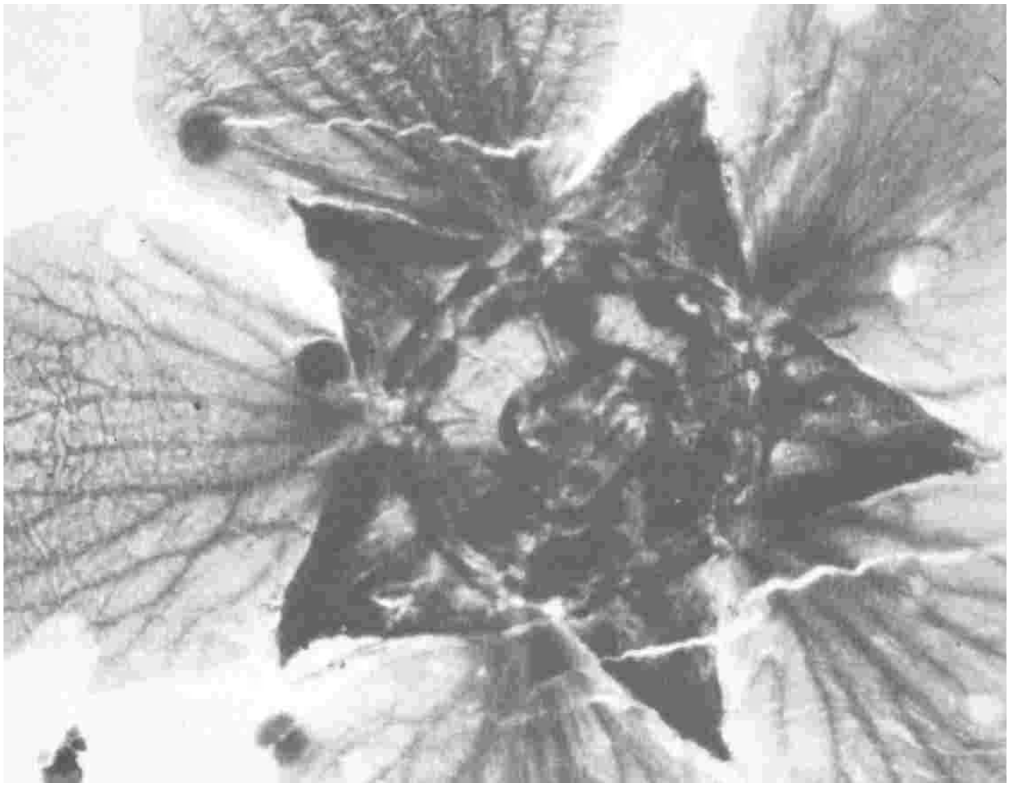
(Taka Iimura, USA, 1968)

Projectors and blank screen as metaphysical monsters, a performance of Iimura's *Dead Movie* -- face to face projections of two 16mm projectors; one projects a white frame (without film), the other projects black leader in an endless loop.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE SCREEN

The conventional, two-dimensional screen surface of cinema's first hundred years is also under attack by holography, a sensational recent development in the visual field. This is the production of a 3-dimensional "image" in space by means of a laser whose light-wave emissions (bouncing off the subject being holographed) are captured on a photo-sensitive surface without passing through lenses and projected in space. (5) Short holographic films -- viewable without special glasses -- already exist. The future presages life-size 3-dimensional holographic motion pictures, through and around which the viewer will be able to pass -- a probably boon to film art as well as pornography.

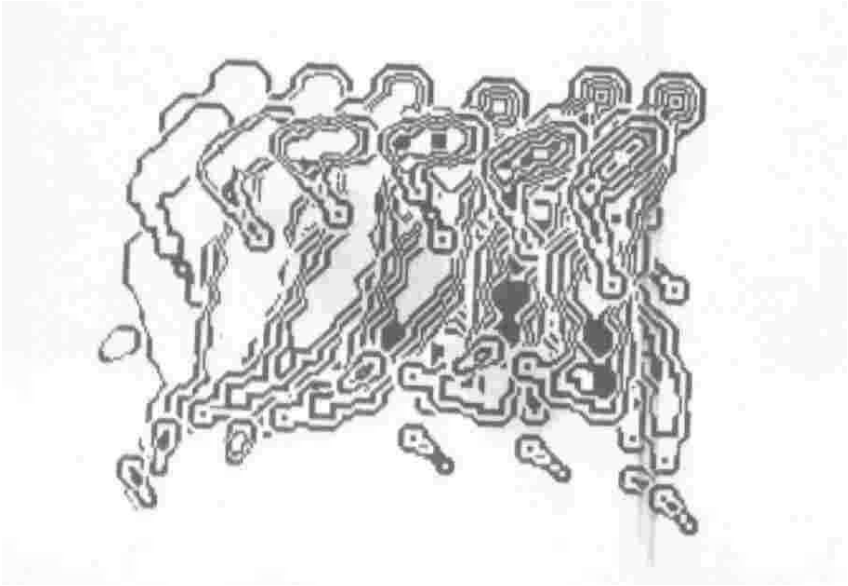
Youngblood points to the ability of holography to record natural phenomena beyond the range of human perception -- shockwaves, electrical vibrations, ultra-slow motion events -- thereby contributing to the experiencing of non-ordinary realities beyond the range of conventional cinema. (6)



MOTHLIGHT
(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1961)
Limbs, wings, and other parts of moths,
laboriously "glued" to the film strip with
mylar tape, become a luxuriant, brown-
tinged abstract animation during projection.
No camera is use; the film is "built" from life itself. SC

THE ELIMINATION OF THE CAMERA

Another development, primarily associated with Len Lye and Norman McLaren, has been the creation of films without use of a camera. Based on the painting or scratching of the film emulsion by the artist (or, as in Brakhage's *Mothlight*, the glueing of extraneous materials to the film strip), this technique has created many beautiful abstract works. In some, even the sound is created without musical instruments merely by "scratching" the soundtrack portion of the film strip in particular ways.



OLYMPIAD
(Lillian Schwartz, USA, 1971)
A computer animation: a single drawing (instead of the 24 different drawings per second needed in conventional animation) is stored in the computer's memory and then programmed into movement. Every frame and transformation is done by the computer. The "result", though programmed, is not entirely predictable.

THE ELIMINATION OF THE ARTIST

The "unholy" convergence of early Soviet anti-individualism (taken to extreme lengths by the contemporary Chinese campaigns against "credits" for artistic accomplishments), Duchamp's disappearance into reclusion, Warhol's reproduction of "originals" by factory methods, and the rise of radical artists' collectives seem to many observers increasingly to imply the dispensability of the artist.

The recent development of computer-generated films (although programmed by humans) only serves to reaffirm this possibility: for at the very beginning of this curious new art form, it is already clear that from initial programs and memory banks computers can create (indeed, already have created) orchestrated systems of aesthetically pleasing patterns or realistic representations which arise before us in combinations and complexities beyond our productive or absorptive faculties.

Equally startling are A.M. Noll's computer-generated films of a 4-dimensional hypercube (mathematically projected down into 3 dimensions and then projected in superimposition)

which, with slightly different picture for left and right eye, create a powerful 3-dimensional effect without glasses. (7)

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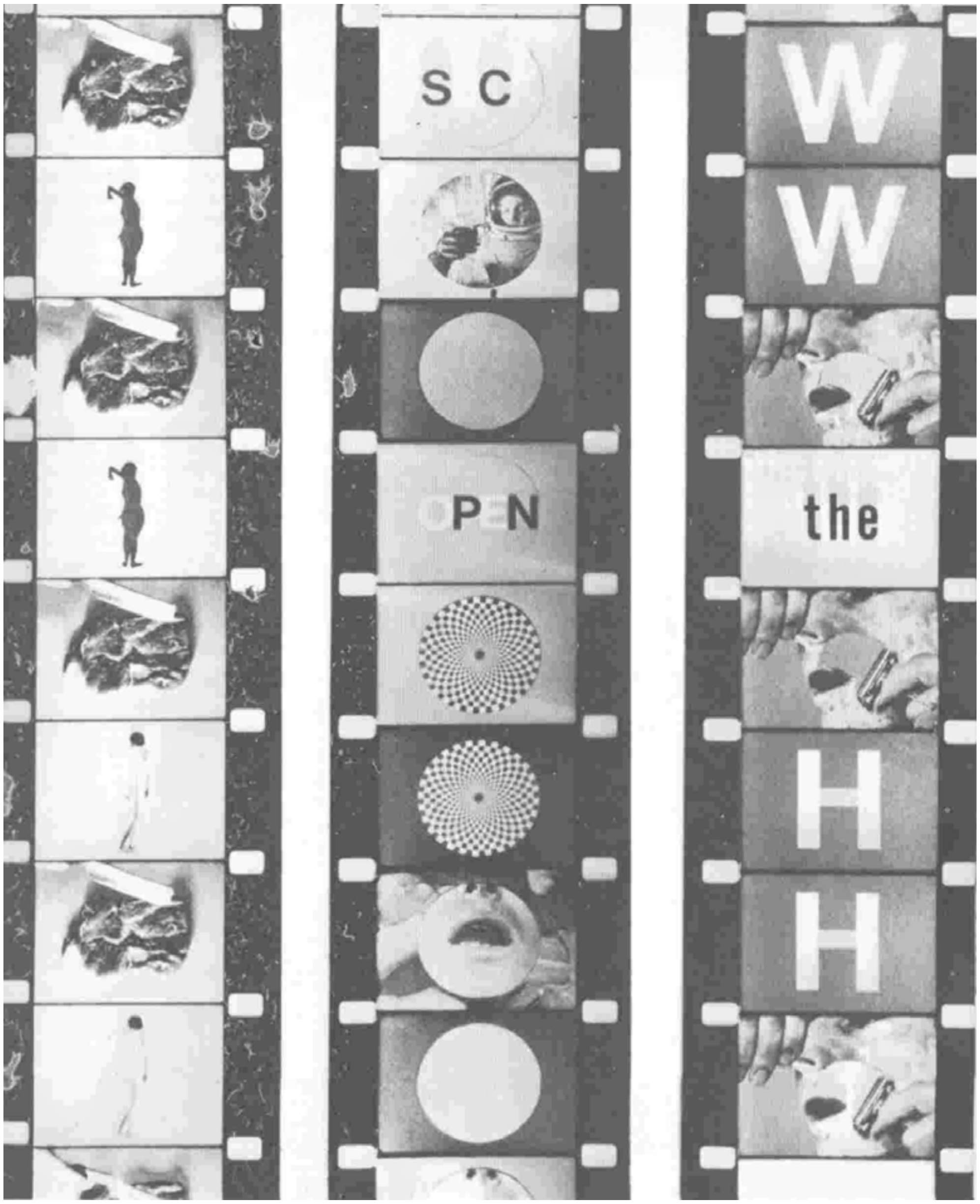
FILMS



RAZOR BLADES

(Paul Sharits, USA. 1968)

Hypnotic multi-screen avant-garde film, consisting of unrelated, compulsively recurring images, a few frames in length, interrupted by irregularly-spaced blank or color frames or lettering. A powerful rhythm and stroboscopic flicker is created by insistent alterations of image and blank frames. Each frame shown here is visibile for only 1/24th of a second, inducing subliminal absorption of image clusters.

This complex and controversial experiment utilizes two screens and the simultaneous projection of two separate films working in tandem. Each consists of unrelated, compulsively recurring images, not more than a few frames in length, interrupted by carefully-spaced blank or color frames. A powerful overall rhythm and stroboscopic flicker is created by the irregular but insistent alternations of image and blankness. The result is a powerful subliminal barrage of strong sensory impressions probing the audience's physiological and psychological limits. Related to neo-dada and pop, the film is strongly structuralist and reductive in its avoidance of "meaning" or "plot", yet offers the satisfaction of pure response to color, pattern, and -- particularly -- rhythm. The images, though intentionally without logic, are frequently "hot" and endlessly repetitive: a fetus, a nude woman (with a razor passing over her), a penis (flaccid or erect), some ambiguous toilet activity; equally ritualistic is the repeated appearance of single, senseless words printed over some of the images. An agitated, monotonous electronic sound accompanies the swiftly moving, constantly changing visuals and flicker patterns.

ARNULF RAINER

(Peter Kubelka, Austria, 1957)

This is the first frame-by-frame abstraction that entirely dispenses with the image and consists solely of carefully orchestrated alternations of blank black or white frames.

BALLET MECHANIQUE

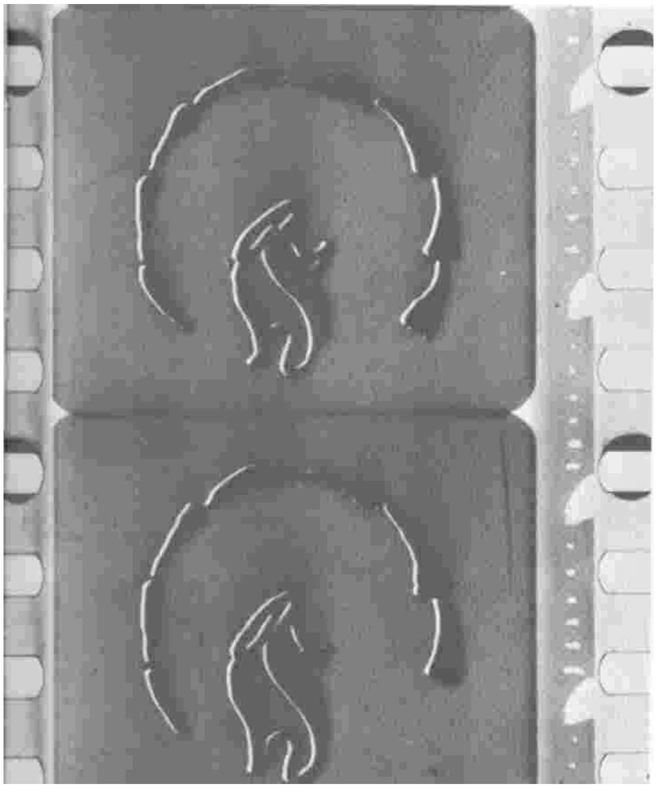
(Fernand Leger, France, 1924)

Leger's only film, an avant-garde classic, fully anticipates several preoccupations of the contemporary underground: use of representational materials, while their documentary aspects are destroyed by eliminating logic or plot; "subliminal" images (only a few frames each); compulsive repetition of action (almost ten times); the beauty of the fragmentary; and the abstraction of objects by close-ups, thus lending them a new identity. Representational reality is left far behind.

BELLS OF ATLANTIS

(Ian Hugo, USA, 1953)

A magical voyage into the subconcious in search of "the lost continent" of first human memories. Based on Anais Nin's prose poem, the film provides a visual equivalent in subaqueous, drifting imagery taken from reality but entirely transformed into a new and sensuously poetic universe. Excellent electronic score by Louis and Bebe Barron.



LOOPS

(Norman McLaren, Canada, 1948)

A color, sound film made without camera or musical instruments. The images are hand-painted onto 35mm film a frame at a time; so is the sound (dots running along edge of filmstrip, size and thickness of dot determines its itch).

BEYOND THE LAW

(Norman Mailer, USA, 1968) (F)

Mailer's outrageous film is a sardonic, mysterious drama of detectives and suspects, locked in obscene and unequal combat in a night-lit, not-so-mythical police station. Suffused with implied or explicit violence, it poses a daring triple paradox: the brilliant capture of "reality" through improvised dialogue and Pennebaker's cinema

verite photography; its almost instantaneous unmasking as a fabrication (Mailer's appearance as an Irish police lieutenant); its re-emergence as "social" truth. As an involved protagonist, Mailer (similar to his role in "The Armies of the Night") both participates in and changes the event. The (fictional) police lieutenant's marital squabbles with (fictional) spouse are convincingly portrayed by the real Mailer and his (then) real wife in a further twist of the reality-illusion theme. The gamblers, murderers, perverts and innocents include Michael McClure, George Plimpton, Rip Torn, and Jack Richardson. A further (and significant) chapter in the Mailer saga.

BLAZES

(Robert Breer, USA. 1961)

4000 frames of film, featuring 100 basic images in breathtakingly rapid sequence produce a single kinetic impression. As in Vertov's experiments, two different images immediately following each other on consecutive frames create superimpositions that do not exist in reality.

BLACK TV

(Aldo Tambellini, USA, 1969)

Videotape is used here as a personal and artistic medium: documentary television images of today's violence are distorted into rapid-fire, black-and-white abstractions, Robert Kennedy's assassination, police brutality, murder, infanticide, prizefights, and Vietnam become blurred insistent symbols of today's horrors.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

(Sam Kaner and Guy Cote, montage sequence by Val Telberg, Great Britain, 1955)

The conventional image is exploded as super-imposition achieves a magical look-through effect which destroys the one-dimensional flatness of film, creates a new universe beyond, and hints at death.

DAMON THE MOWER

(George Dunning, Great Britain, 1971)

An original work of animation art. Tacked onto a wall are two sheets of drawing paper, on which appear, in rapid, mysterious permutations, strange hand-drawn images -- constantly undulating, exploding, reforming. A recurrent motif -- a mower with a scythe -- adds a somber touch. The images, we are told, are in synchronization with an inaudible poem removed from the soundtrack. The effect of confining all "reality" in the film to the sheets of drawing paper is extremely unsettling.

FLICKER

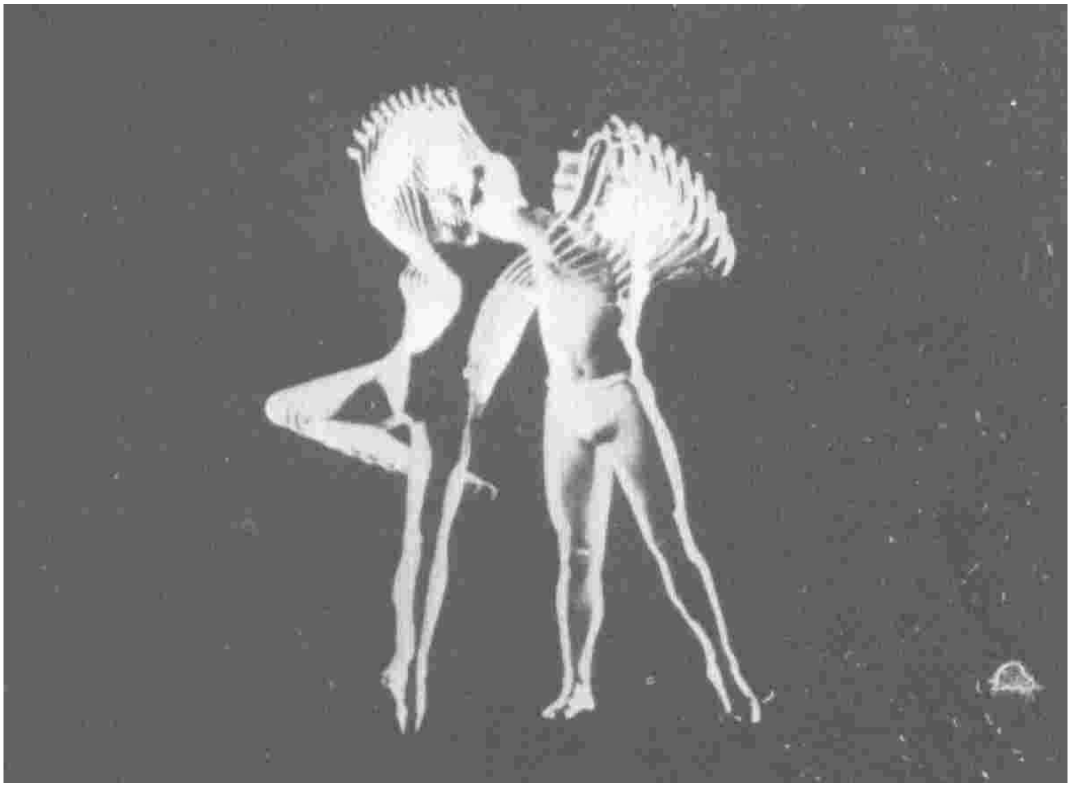
(Tony Conrad, USA, 1966)

This film contains no images at all. It's subject is light and its absence. It consists of combinations of alternating white and black frames, flashing by in constantly changing patterns and causing a continuous stroboscopic flicker effect of great complexity. Whether its frequency is momentarily static or changeable (it ranges from 24 flashes down to 4 flashes per second throughout its 30 minute duration), the effect is literally hypnotic. This concerted "overload" of retina and nervous system provokes an endless variety of changing shapes, patterns and, most surprisingly, colors, whose nature differs with each viewer (even varying from performance to performance). The electronic soundtrack was generated by relays and components carrying different types of information; the various frequencies are orchestrated by the director. This "pure" film deals with perception itself; its hallucinatory effect -- despite absence of image, content,wor meaning -- reveals an unsuspected congruity with deep emotional needs. **SC**

H 2 0

(Ralph Steiner, USA, 1929)

Though entirely based on elements of reality -- the rhythms and patterns of light and shadow on water -- this classic study by the well-known documentary filmmaker and still photographer approaches pure abstraction, as the camera becomes increasingly absorbed with textures and design.



PAS DE DEUX

(Norman McLaren, Canada, 1968)

By printing the negative in multiple images, each frame reproduced up to eleven times, McLaren captures movement past and yet to come in a rhapsodic flow of ineffable grace. The simultaneous reproduction of consecutive movement fulfills an age-old dream. The dancers, in white and lit from behind, move in slow-motion on a totally black stage.

INNOCENCE UNPROTECTED (NEVINOST BEZ ZASTITE)

(Dusan Makavejev, Yugoslavia, 1968) (F)

The director of *WR-Mysteries of the Organism* in this earlier film created a provocative and original collage which combined, with subtle irony, the first Serbian sound film ever made ("an outrageously naive melodrama of lecherous lust vs. true love" - *Sunday Times*) with Nazi newsreels and 1968 interviews of participants in the original production. The original 1942 Serbian film was directed by its star, Dragoljub Aleksic, famed real-life acrobat whose stunts -- seen in the film -- included changing from flying planes by his teeth, transporting Belgrade ladies from rooftop to rooftop by high wire, and bodily stopping motorcars driven at top speed. It deals with his hair-raising adventures in saving an orphan heroine from the clutches of shameless and repulsive characters after breathtaking feats of daring. A sly and loving film, it forces us to take this persistent man and his bizarre values almost as seriously as he does, thus making us more humble about our own. It successfully destroys conventional concepts of time and reality in its mingling of two films -- from different periods -- one fictional, the other non-fictional -- with the actors of the former constantly breaking its illusion by appearing in the latter in real-life portraits 20 years later.

INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY

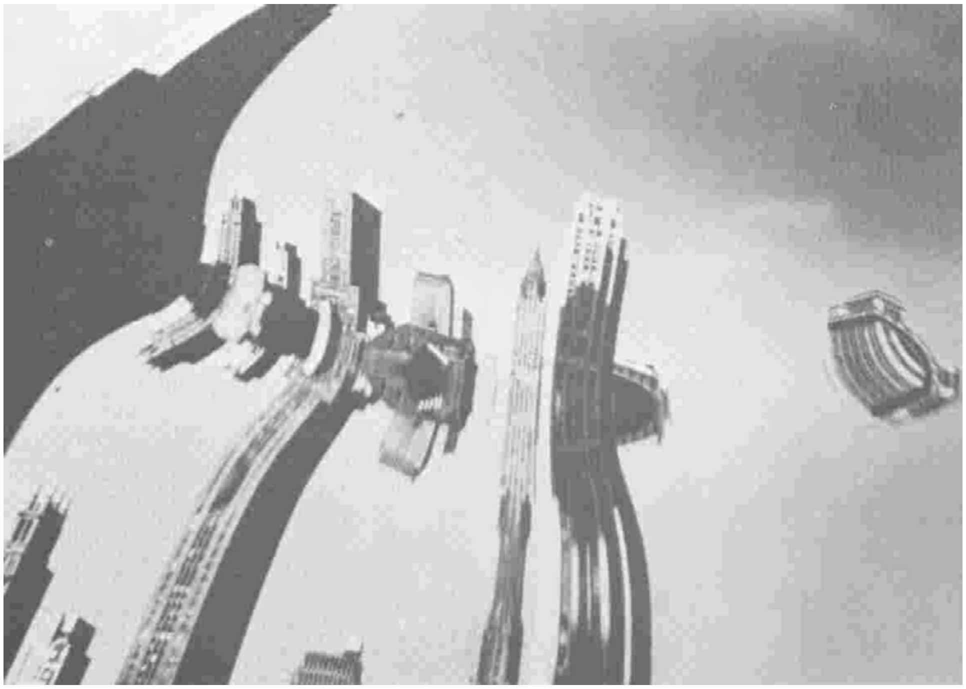
(George Landow, USA, 1969)

An empty, ordinary room in an apartment. There is furniture, a lamp, a television set. No image is visible on it, except the changing variations of light on its screen, indicating that the set is on. At the narrator's request, a large hand -- live -- enters the frame with a pencil and numbers portions of what is now suddenly revealed not to have been a real room at all, but a projected "image" of a room, a film within a film. The sudden superimposition of a live hand over what we had accepted as reality is one of the more unsettling moments of contemporary minimal cinema. Later we see a young woman threading a projector, as instructed by the same invisible narrator; suddenly a subtitle informs us (in terms familiar on television) that this is a "re-enactment". Since the scene is by definition a fictional portrayal of a situation and cannot be considered a "re-enactment" (of what?) this constitutes a subtle toying with levels of reality and an attack, as is the rest of the film, on screen illusion.

THE MAN WHO LEFT HIS WILL ON FILM (TOKYO SENSO SENGO HIWA)

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1970) (F)

Aesthetic and political rebel, Oshima is one of the most original directors now working in Japan. This is a metaphysical tale of a radical student filmmaker who succumbs to the illusion that he has committed suicide and left a film as his testament. Attempting to "decipher" this film and the "dead man's" life, he rapes his own girl (who plays along with the illusion to cure him) and retraces the "other man's" life by means of the film, only to find himself in his own birthplace. The film testament proves incomprehensible. He therefore refilms it, intending to create a work superior to that of his illusory rival; but his girl, to save him, willfully interrupts and changes each scene. He finally realizes that he must kill the dead man -- himself -- in order to be free. Several key episodes, including sex scenes, are recreated by the protagonists in front of a screen showing the film testament so that they are projected onto their bodies. Throughout, the style is meticulously realistic, meticulously metaphysical.



N.Y., N.Y.

(Francis Thompson, USA, 1958)

Distortion lenses, spheric and parabolic mirrors, and prisms create a semi-abstract, atomized, and subjective version of the city, in which buildings float in space and man has become an alienated, distorted mass-being. The effect is startling and disturbing.

"An admirable example of what may be called the Distorted Documentary -- a new form of visionary art. In this very strange and beautiful picture we see the city of New York as it appears when photographed through multiple prisms, or reflected in the backs of spoons, polished hub caps, spherical and parabolic mirrors. We still recognize houses, people, shop fronts, taxicabs, but recognize them as elements in one of those living geometries which are so characteristic of the visionary experience. I was amazed to see that virtually ever pictorial device invented by the old masters of non-representational art makes its appearance, alive, glowing, intensely significant." -- Aldous Huxley, "Heaven and Hell"

PERMUTATIONS

(John Whitney, USA, 1968)

A brilliant computer-generated study by one of America's foremost pioneers of abstract cinema. "It is now known and amply demonstrated that computer-graphic systems are useful in the creation of a considerable diversity of abstract graphic forms. It can be shown that the precision and detail of the graphics and the power of the computer to repeated thousands of images, each one with the most subtle incremental variation, makes for an instrument with superb motion-generating capability. This power of the computer to produce endless variations upon patterns, which stems from the basically mathematical foundation by which all images are formed, means that we have at hand an instrument for graphics that is analogous to the variational power of all musical instruments and the mathematical foundation of all musical form." - John Whitney

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PERSONA

(Ingmar Bergman, Sweden, 1965-66) (F)

"As the title tells us this film is about reality and illusion -- the persona of a person indicating the latter, the root of the word being old Latin for mask. Parallel to the story (perhaps horizontal to it would be a better description), Bergman also shows us that film itself (when it refers to itself as this one does) is also about reality and illusion. The illusion is the filmed story, the two women, their relationship, the husband of one of them, etc. The reality (or *a* reality at any rate) is the fact that it is a film we are watching. This is proved to us by the inclusion of film leader, shots of a film lab, a shot of the making-of-the-film itself, scenes of the film we are seeing running through a projector, and sections where the film is apparently ripped, where a frame apparently catches fire and burns. At the very end of the film (a scene which "proves" it has been a film we are watching), we see the arc-lamp of the projector going out -- a parallel to the first (and last) word that the personified heroine speaks: 'Nothing'. " - Donald Ritchie SC

FANTASTIC VISION

(Eugene Deslaw, Spain/Switzerland, year unknown)

The first solarized film ever made. The elimination of realistic detail and sharp outlines while preserving legibility creates a strongly poetic image. The contemporary avant-garde has returned to this device in a technologically more sophisticated manner with breathtaking results.

THE SECRET CINEMA

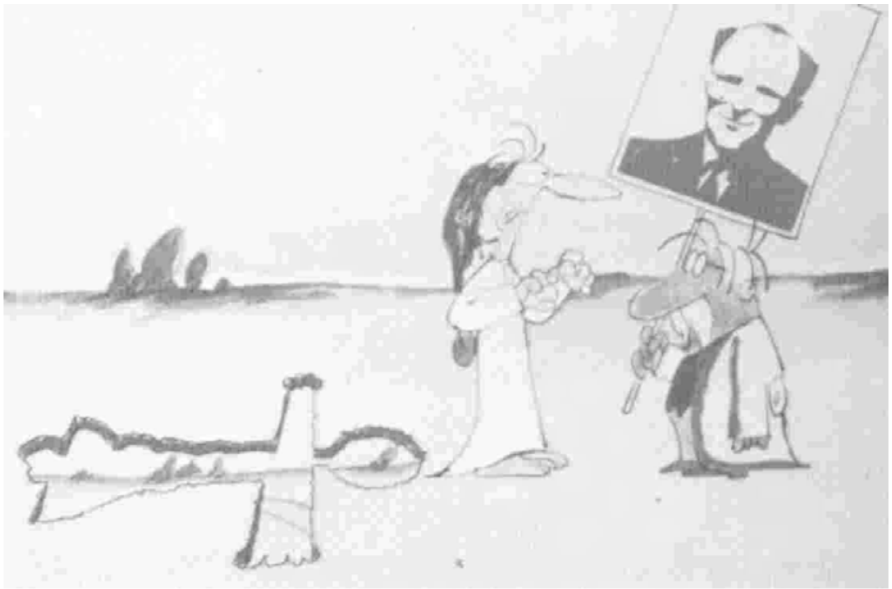
(Paul Bartel, USA, 1966)

Through a series of hilarious yet increasingly disturbing incidents, a young girl becomes convinced she suffers from a paranoid delusion that her life is being secretly filmed and projected in separate chapters at a local movie house. In an extremely clever play on illusion and reality, she -- and we -- discover that she is right. Beneath the flippant facade an uncomfortable black comedy unfolds, as the filmmaker deftly manipulates our subconcious; for the plight of the hapless heroine, confused, paranoid, surrounded by people who seldom are what they seem to be, corresponds to our own deepest fears. SC

UFO'S

(Lillian Schwartz and Ken Knowlton, USA, 1972)

This film further indicates that computer animation -- once a gimmick -- is fast becoming a fully-fledged art; the complexity of its design and movement, its speed and rhythm, richness of form and motion -- coupled with stroboscopic effects to affect brain waves -- is quite overpowering. What is even more ominous is that while design and action are programmed, the "result", in any particular sequence, is neither entirely predictable nor under complete human control, being created at a rate faster (and in concatenations more complex) than eye and mind can follow or initiate. Our sense of reality is thus disturbed not only by the filmmaker by also by the machines we have produced.



TUP-TUP

(Nedejlko Dragic, Yugoslavia, 1972)

An astonishing incursion of modern art into the animated film: one of the characters "breaks" through to another reality, thereby subverting the illusionism of the image and calling into question what must never be doubted: the absolute "truth" of the image as the only existing reality.

[THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION](#)

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FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

A PROPOS DE NICE
(Jean Vigo, France, 1930)
"A Propos De Nice" is one of the most unconventional documentaries ever made -- with irony and bitterness the camera explores this center of middle-class decadence, the monstrous hotels, the amorous elderly women with their ruthless gigolos, the stinking alleys and grimy bistros filled with tramps, ponces, fences; a scathing contrast of the idle poor and the idle rich." (George Morrison, Sequence, *6*)

INTERNATIONAL LEFT AND REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA

The subversion of existing value systems and social structures in political cinema ranges from criticism of particular issues to

propagandistic attacks on a country or power bloc, from the subtle to the intentionally direct, from the reformist to the revolutionary. The exposure of social ills or injustice, the satirizing or demystification of institutions and leaders, the recording of conflict or disturbance, the exhortation to radical violence or non-violent revolution -- these form the themes of political cinema.

All these films, whether their intent is reformist or revolutionary, aim to change the viewer's consciousness. Considering the hundreds of dull, ineffectual films propounding laudable objectives, the question of form arises once again, for the basic problem of political subversion is whether bourgeois form can be used to advance radical content. Surprisingly, many radical filmmakers cast their works in a conventional, often dated mold, unaware of the far more profound impact of artists attempting to fuse new content with new form (Resnais, Marker, Solanas, Franju, Rocha, Herzog, Godard, *et al*). But if one trend in political world cinema is to continue blindly in the use of outworn stylistic structures, pedestrian realism or naturalism, or pseudo-radical narration superimposed on indifferent and dead images, another is to use film as a tool to change the world, no longer an "art object" existing "parallel" to the world. This supreme attempt at subversion -- film as act rather than creation -- represents a desperate attempt to bridge the gap between life and art. The first step is to denounce art itself as a bourgeois deception, thereby echoing the surrealist, dadaist, and anti-illusionist stance. Subversion, in this view, requires an utilitarian tool (rather than an aesthetic medium) to advance the revolution; concomitantly, the role of "art" is completed once the revolution is achieved.

The second step is to activate the spectator, bringing him closer to the work, which at the same time approaches him by becoming more life-like. For the completed work is but part of the final equation; it begins to exist fully only when confronted by an audience which brings to it its own associations and frames of reference and accepts the communication offered in a particular and subjective manner. It is only then that the process of communication -- and in this case, of subversion -- is complete. The continual dilemma of the subversive artist has always been how to confer his subversion on his audience. To the extent that modern art has constantly aimed at breaking down the invisible barrier between work of art and beholder -- in the cinema, from Eisenstein and Vertov to Godard and the avant-garde -- it completes the circle of subversion, and indeed becomes a tool in the political struggle.

The basis of politically and socially subversive cinema is the tension that exists between society and artist. This expresses itself in forms and subjects that vary from country to country, resulting not from greater or lesser artistic sophistication or skill but from differing stages of societal development, from political pressure, from the absence or presence of democratic tendencies

and the degree of sharpness of social contradictions. In each instance, however, the artist goes further than his particular Establishment wishes him to. This "going beyond" is the precise characteristic of all subversive art.

THE WEST: REBELS, MAOISTS, AND THE NEW GODARD

Although political films have been produced in all Western countries, most of them are from the United States. This is mainly due to the extensive use and high technological level of 16mm production equipment and laboratory facilities, and the relative absence, as yet, of censorship. Apart from the thousands of films produced by students, independent filmmakers, or political film collectives, there also exist distribution companies controlled by the New Left (such as "Newsreel", American Documentary Films, and Tri-Continental Film Center) which attempt to extend the area of political film exhibition. Recent developments in videotape (the availability of portable, lightweight equipment) and cable TV (the creation of "public access" channels, the programming of which must by law remain uncontrolled and open to everyone) point to a further increase in the production of such films. The end of the war in Vietnam and the deceptive quiet of the country, however, tends, at least temporarily, to inhibit their creation. Since the basic problems of race, class, or generation conflict remain unresolved or, even worse, are artifically papered over, the future will undoubtedly witness new wavs of radicalization.

The 1968 student revolts in Western Europe gave political cinema there an added impetus, the abortive "States General" of French cinema even calling for a restructuring of the industry based on collective self-management, elimination of the profit motive, opposition to the star-cult, to censorship, and private ownership of the means of film production, distribution, and exhibition. But if this movement ultimately proved as abortive as the revolutionary upsurge itself, it also contributed to the radicalization of one of the great French directors, Godard, and his raising once again, on an international level, the problem of revolutionary cinema. If his previous work had appeared to conventional (and even "liberal") critics and audiences so extreme as to be beyond the pale, Godard now rejected it as being in itself hopelessly bourgeois. "I wanted to conquer the fortress of French traditional cinema", he says in one of his fascinating interviews of the period, "I did and now I occupy it as its prisoner." And: "I used to bang my dish on the bars of the cell. They let me make all the racket I wanted." There was therefore, according to the new Godard, to be no more seduction of the audience by "art"; no more "art for art's sake" or films of "consumption".

The narrative cinema, even as modified by himself in *Breathless*, *Masculine-Feminine*, and other works, was hopelessly outdated; the "dictatorship of the director" had to be smashed and replaced by group filmmaking; the work was never to be "finished" but remain forever in flux; and the imperialist inundation of the individual with worthless or manipulative pictures was to be replaced by visual primitivism, the reduction of the image to a few shots -- a strengthening of Godard's earlier tendencies toward minimal cinema, here combined with Maoism.

Unfortunately, the resultant films -- from *Meet You At Mao* to *Tout Va Bien* -- prove that to "will" political cinema into being without the mediation of art is self-defeating. Despite brilliant sequences (reminiscent of the "old" Godard), these works are visually sterile, intellectually shallow, and, in terms of their overbearing, insistent soundtracks, didactic, pedantic, dogmatic. The "creative boredom" of minimal cinema may well constitute a valid investigation of the medium's potential from an aesthetic viewpoint, but whether the masses will be activated by a 10-minute harangue on woman's liberation monotonously delivered against the background of a young lady's navel (*See You At Mao*) is questionable. As the minimalist directors and theoreticians have properly pointed out, they are concerned with medium and work "as such", with an exploration of form and structure devoid of meaning and message; an "aesthetic" approach in total contradiction to Godard's didactic preoccupations. The very emphasis on "word-film" as a political weapon is debatable, particularly when compared to such masterpieces of subversive visual cinema as *The Hour of the Blast Furnaces*, *Battle of Algiers*, and others. Yet Godard's obsessive radicalism and continued experimentation has had a positive, catalytic effect. It has already produced both emulators and others exploring new paths. Perhaps these late-Godard radical films will come to be viewed as primitive, important forerunners of an ultimately successful fusion of form and content in the service of revolutionary subversion. "In the service of"; for the search for a cinema that is itself "an act" rather than "an art" is illusory. Even revolutionary cinema ultimately remains a reflection of different intensities of light on a flat surface.

LEFT AND REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA: THE WEST

SUBVERSION IN EASTERN EUROPE: AESOPIAN METAPHORS

The failure to extend the proletarian revolution to the West and the subsequent degeneration of the Russian revolution has tragically transformed the political system that promised man the widest possible freedom into the world's most efficient totalitarian regime.

In the cinema as elsewhere, the state's complete control over the means of productions and of communication seems effectively to preclude opposition or dissent. Yet the spirit of freedom surreptitiously re-emerges, particularly among the young of each new generation. Symptomatically, just because this spirit of freedom is directed towards the extension of democracy and, in the arts, towards the flowering of different aesthetic tendencies, it appears counter-revolutionary to the regime (which thereby unintentionally defines itself in action) and new repressive measures are instituted, to which the new pioneers respond with new tactics. This constant state of tension between creative artist and government bureaucracy is basic to the eastern societies from Eisenstein in Russia to Schorm in Czechoslavakia, Skolimowski in Poland, and Makavejev in Yugoslavia. Unable to pose questions head-on, the artist is forced into allegory, metaphor, and indirectness -- secret communications to be decoded by the viewer. These courageous filmmakers are the moralists of their society, reminiscent of Diderot and the *Encyclopedistes*; for where politics is inhibited, art tends to assume its function and form and style -- not merely content -- become ideologically charged. in this sense, while propaganda films are lacking in Eastern Europe, poltical films are not.

Individual works involving lesser or greater dissent can be found at infrequent intervals in each of the national cinemas of the East. But the emergence of an entire "school" has so far been limited to the short-lived Polish experience of the Gomulka years of the fifties and the equally brief and brilliant Czech film renaissance, immediately before and under Dubcek. Though now only a glowing moment of history -- it was destroyed by the Russian occupation of Czechoslovakia -- this latter movement and its works stand as astonishing revelations of the hidden trends within the so-called monolithic ideological structures of the East.

To Western eyes, this movement offered a challenge: the most difficult film to find in Prague was a Communist propaganda film and the easiest, a humanist work in the idiom of modern cinema. The "socialist realism" of the past -- a sentimentalized falsification of reality -- has been superseded by an attempt to confront truth and uncertainty, experience and doubt. These Czech films deal with alienation, with anti-heroes and the corruption, by terror, of victims as well as executioners. Devoid of "official" ideology, they are filled with unorthodox compassion for people as they are and no longer, as in Stalin's times, as they should be.

The astonishing, tightly knit group of young filmmakers represented the values of the first post-Stalinist generation. It was striking to note how similar their views were to those of the West's rebellious youth, which, from a different starting point, had also become engaged in a search, without illusions, for possible ideals and provisional truths. It seemed that the world was perversely backing into an enforced brotherhood, which would universalize such problems as individual freedom in a bureaucratic society, estrangement between generations, the failure of dogmatic ideologies, and eternal confrontations of imperfect innocence as against the corruption of so-called maturity.

Two complementary tendencies dominated the young Czech cinema. The realist camp (similar to the Italian neorealists and *"cinema verite"*) concentrated on the significance of the insignificant, using non- professionals and actual locations for greater authenticity. Unlike the Italians, however, the Czech realists (Forman, Passer, Menzel) seemed less ideological, sentimental and heroic. In providing a truth and spontaneity too long frowned upon, their films were as radical as the elaborate creations of the allegorical-symbolist wing.

This camp (represented by Schorm, Nemec, Masa, Juracek, and Vera Chytilova) was far more cerebral; its scenarios were careful intellectual constructions; its settings and visual syles intentionally artificial; its tone oblique, suffused with existentialism. There was less of the smiling optimism of the neorealist camp; a more somber, even pessimistic, mood obtained. Stylistically, they tended to be allegorical, symbolist, or even "absurd"; touches of Bunuel, Fellini, Bergman abounded and the possibility of an underlying complexity too dense to be unravelled was hinted at.

However, it ws the influence of Kafka that loomed largest. This modern prophet of ambiguity, unidentifiable nightmare, and sublime intimations of limited hope had finally become inescapable. The property of the world, he was at last accepted in his own country as well. Following his ideological rehabilitation at the end of the Stalin era, his works instantly sold out and entered the intellectual and conceptual framework of the new generation.

The Dubcek era, by modifying an artificial isolation from abroad of 17 years, reconstituted the link with Czechoslavakia's unique past, which predisposes the country toward the more modern cultural tendencies. Situated at the center of an age-old, warring continent, always a minority within larger empires, this unfortunate country has perhaps been more frequently subjugated or "liberated" than any other European nation, as well as subjected to the most sophisticated cultural influences. Surrealism, Cubism, Dadaism were at home under Masaryk and Benes. Ironically, Hitler forced into Prague an additional group of outstanding *emigre* exponents of "decadent" modern art, and the isolation from world art under Hitler and Stalin led to an advantageous amalgamation of leading Czech elements in theatre, film, painting, and literature into one common milieu, the inevitable nucleus for the forces of cultural liberalization.

Despite Russian destruction of this movement -- all the directors were forced out of the industry or into exile -- it has left its mark and, together with the Polish film renaissance under Gomulka (Polanski, Borowczyk, Lenica, Skolimowski, Wajda, Kawalerowicz, Has, and Munk), has set standards of thematic and aesthetic daring that have become prototypes for filmmakers in other Eastern countries as well. In vain does one nowadays look for "socialist realism", "positive heroes", or paeans to tractors; instead, in their best works, there is a painful confrontation of the basic question of human freedom under a collectivized regime without democratic controls, a positive scepticism and rejection of hypocrisy which reveal a struggle for new values and new lifestyles.

These films are not "counter-revolutionary", but rather attempt to clarify what the Czech reform movement used as its slogan; "socialism with a human face". They prove that arrogantly exercised power, alienation, and the corruption of both the individual and society are as rife in the East as in the West, and that the aspirations of the most progressive youth in both blocs are identical: a more equitable society, yet one that preserves, indeed extends, the best democratic traditions of the West.

LEFT AND REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA: THE EAST

THE THIRD WORLD: A NEW CINEMA

The cinema of the Third World is as young, varied, and amorphous as the different political and geographic realities it represents and is united only in its determination to liberate itself from the sway of foreign domination; its subversion, therefore, is primarily directed against a power elite which is alien and extraneous and a native ruling class allied and subservient to it. Perhaps the politically and aesthetically most developed Third World Cinema was Brazil's *"Cinema Novo"* movement, one of the new "national" cinemas to emerge in the last decade; it accurately reflected the social fervor and progressive nationalist commitment of a new generation coming to maturity in a stagnant, dictatorial oligarchy shored up by American capital and based on poverty, oppression, and cultural and political colonization. This group of young filmmakers attempted to develop an indigenous, socially relevant Brazilian cinema, free of domination by foreign, particularly American capital, drawing its themes and aesthetic preoccupations from the country's heritage and tragic need for transformation; but the political climate in Brazil has now, at least temporarily, put an end to its activities.

The basic themes of *Cinema Novo* are those of Brazilian reality: the archaic, cruel "sertao", the sun-parched steppes that occupy much of the country's huge territory, in which, as in a primeval, mythological landscape, the ultimate tragedies of oppression, lust, heroism, and betrayal are played out; the exploits and myths of the *"cangaceiros"* and *"beatos"*, anarchist and flamboyant bandit-rebels who redress social injustice by violence directed against the rich; and the *"favela"*, Rio de Janiero's festering shanty-town slums. In these basic landscapes, *Cinema Novo* has placed characters tenaciously clinging to outworn privileges and exorbitant rebels determined to destroy them.

A full-fledged, nationalized film industry entirely in the service of the revolution has been developed in Cuba, which produces a significant number of feature films by internationally recognized

artists, documentaries, propagandist shorts and strongly political newsreels. Despite increasing pressures towards ideological conformity, the Cuban films remain refreshingly free of the stultifying "socialist realism" of the Stalin period in the East, reaching levels of poetry (Gomez' *First Charge of the Machete*) and intellectual sophistication (Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment*) that place this very young industry in the front rank of the third world production. The "subversive" Cuban cinema, perhaps surprisingly, is primarily found in the propaganda films by Santiago Alvarez who today is one of the world's most prolific and notable political filmmakers.

A young, but growing, film industry is emerging in Algeria, with a strongly political bent, emphasizing the fusing of nationalist and radical elements so dominant there. The features deal primarily with the still traumatic period of the anti-French struggle, both fictionally and by the use of newsreel materials; the shorts frequently exhibit a greater variety of subject matter; hardly any, however, classify as either pure entertainment or pure politics. The most strongly political work is probably Ahmed Rachedi's *The Twilight of the Damned*, an anti-imperialist history of Algeria.

Though Chinese films have not been widely seen in the West -- a situation that hopefully will now change -- there is no reason to assume that a large new source of subversive films will suddenly emerge from what by all accounts is a strongly ulitarian, conservative, socially "positive" cinema, free of aesthetic "frills" or even propagandistic subversion either of its own establishment (unthinkable) or of world imperialism (such films would already be known in the radical West or the film festival circuit). It is entirely possible that the most subversive Chinese film so far is *Acupunctural Anaesthesia* with its cold, scientific demystification of the human body.

Some political films have also come from North Vietnam, Chile, Mexico, Bolivia, and Senegal; and from Argentina, probably the masterpiece of Third World Cinema, the violently anti-American *The Hour of the Blast Furnaces* by Fernando Solanas.

Finally, tribute must be paid to a type of political film almost unique to South America and directly linked to the nature of its political systems: the illegal film, produced (and distributed!) under the most dangerous and trying circumstances, the ultimate, if not in film art, at least so in personal revolutionary commitment; chiefly these are exposes of social ills or documentaries of otherwise unreported political demonstrations, strikes, and riots.

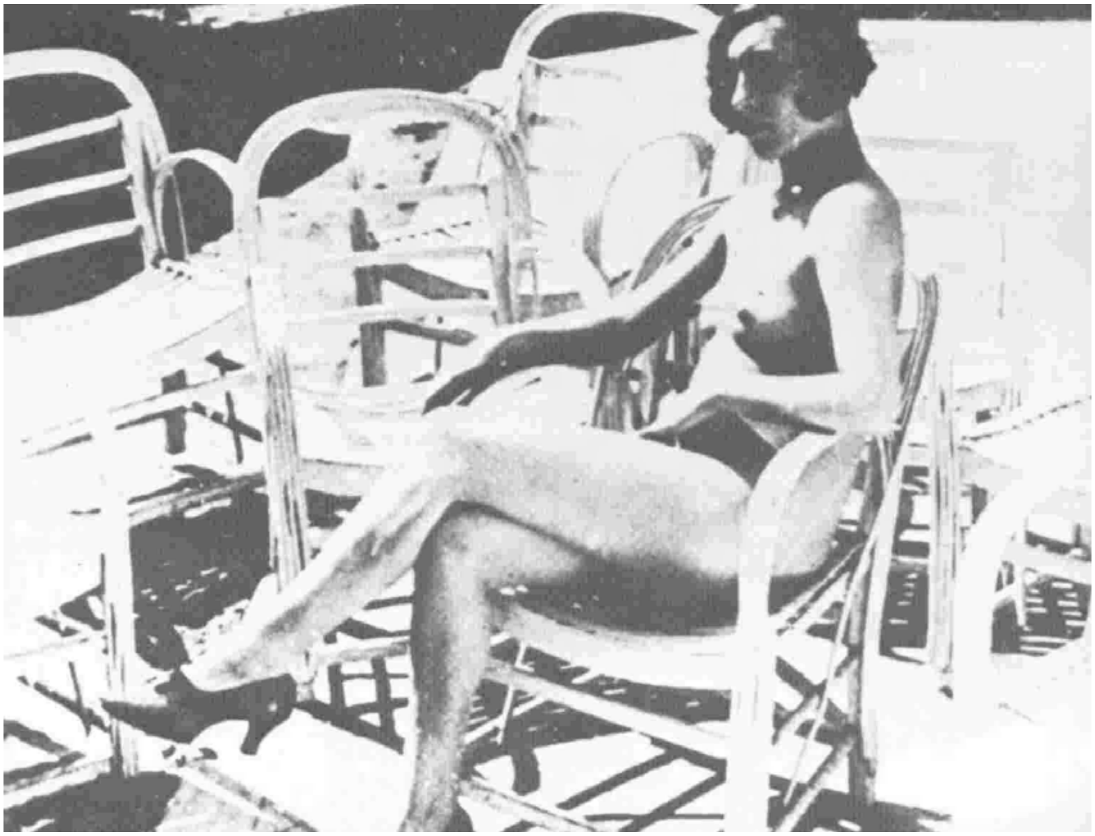
LEFT AND REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA: THIRD WORLD

EAST GERMANY: AGAINST THE WEST

Some of the strongest and simultaneously most questionable political films of the post-war era have come from East Germany. Originating in the works of Annelie and Andrew Thorndike, continued by Joachim Hellwig and, more recently, by Walter Heynowski, these hard-hitting, tightly edited films at first aimed at identifying West Germany with the Nazis, establishing a continuity of personnel if not ideology, and were later broadened to include West Germany's imperialist ally, the USA. The Thorndykes called their series of films *The Archives Testify*, and this proved to be the ideological shape of all East German films of this type. Based on archives, official legislation, secret orders, and newsreels of the Nazi period, they exposed, prosecuted, and convicted their victims on film by carefully chosen visuals and sophisticated editing. There is no doubt whatsoever that in these films real Nazis and certain crimes of the West were indeed exposed; and to this extent, they were not only subversive works *par excellence*, but, due to their wide distribution, quite effective. Yet they raise the most disturbing questions (if not, indeed, parallels to Nazi propaganda films) in their crude simplifications, tendentious pre-selection, shaping and even doctoring of what may well be valid materials, use of political "amalgams" (the meretricious cross-cutting of materials in reality unrelated), and insertion of staged scenes (without even identifying them as such). In short, they are propaganda work rather than political films -- "trials" by camera and montage -- and ultimately operate, despite their intellectual, factual gloss, primarily on an emotional level.

The "subversion" of these films, all made prior to the 1972 *detente* between the two Germanies, was directed against an external foe and as such was in accordance with official East German foreign policy of the time. No "subversive" films exist in East Germany directed against its own establishment. It is not that there are no social or political problems: it is simply that the state owns all motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition. Neither cautious, allegorical works (as in Hungary, Czechoslavakia, and Poland), nor directly political films (such as *Red Squad*, *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, and many more in America) have so far been made in this most orthodox of Eastern countries. Perhaps their fulminations against Western Nazis in high positions would sound less self-righteous if there existed just one East German film drawing attention to the use of former Nazi bureaucrats (or nuclear physicists!) in the East.

EAST GERMANY: AGAINST THE WEST



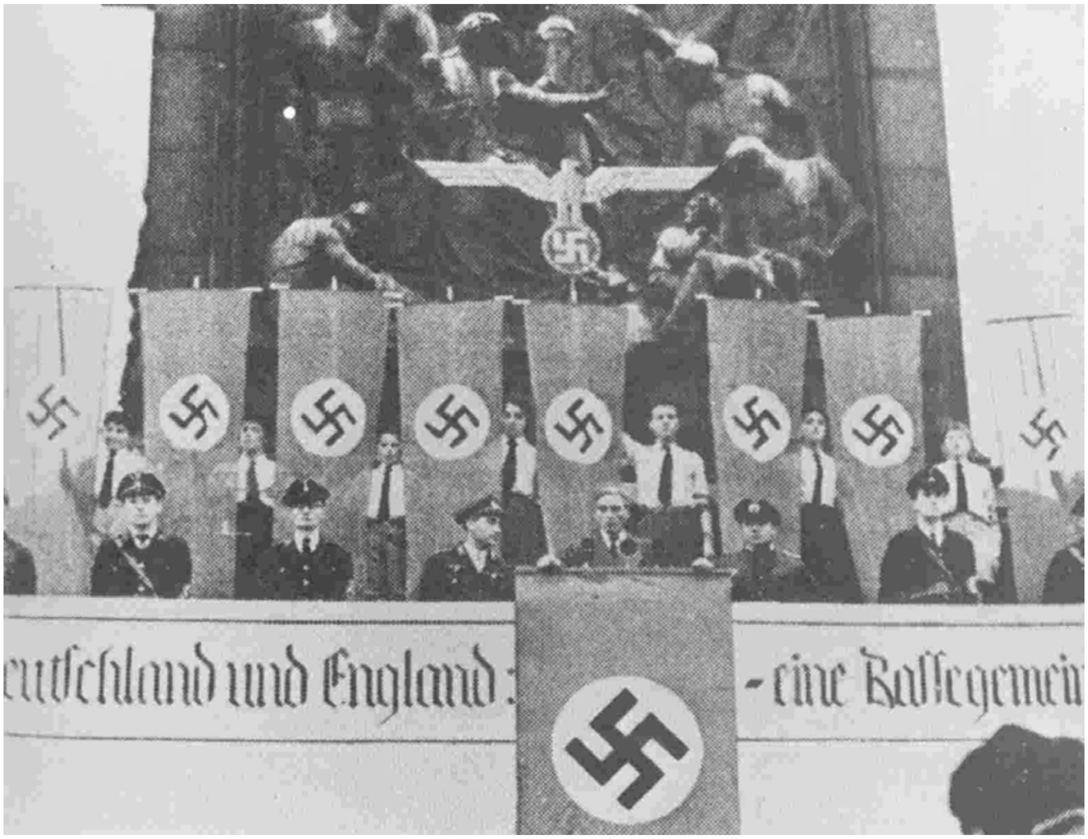
A PROPOS DE NICE
(Jean Vigo, France, 1930)
It also commented visually on "the girls" in the terrace cafes by simply juxtaposing two images.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

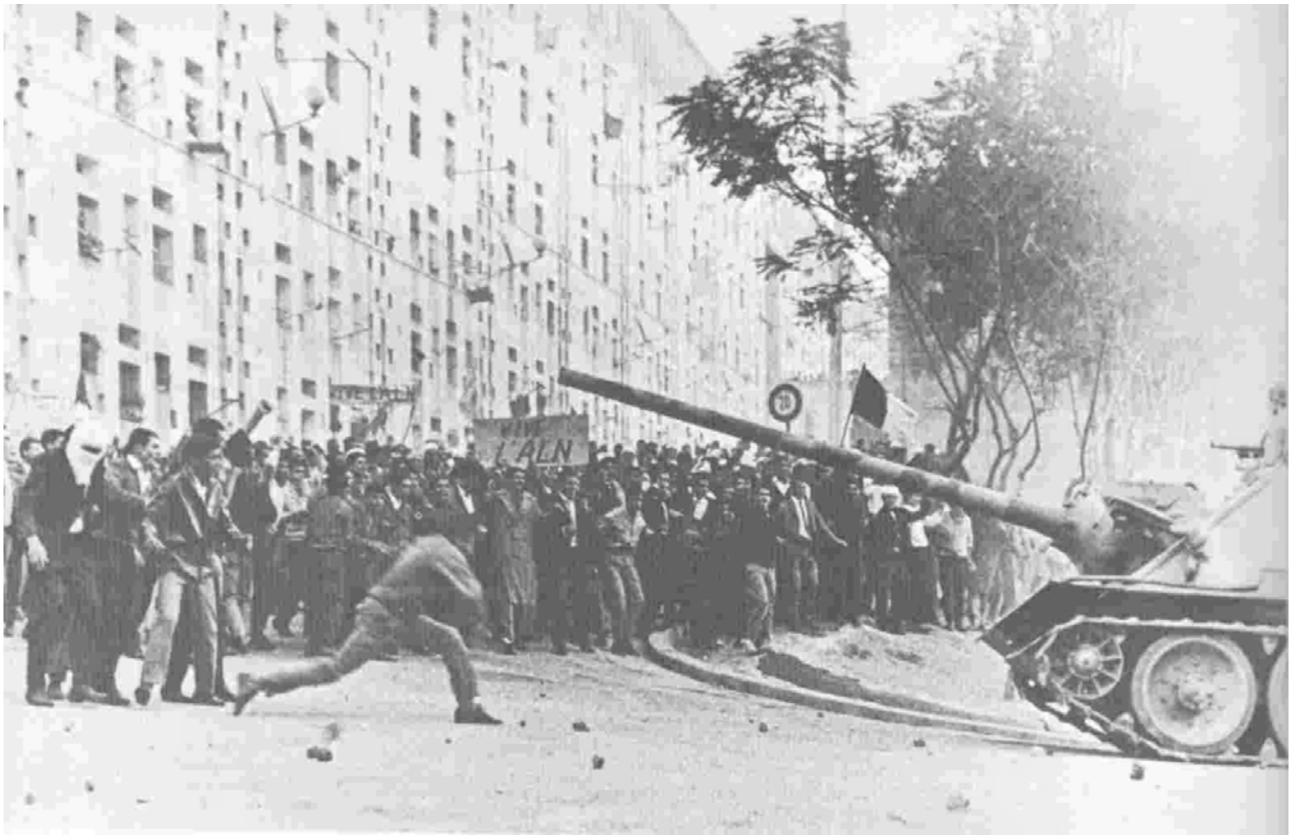
FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART


eutſchland und England : - eine Raſſegemein

IT HAPPENED HERE
(Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo, Great Britain, 1964)
A disturbing reconstruction of what life in Great Britain might have been like if Germany had won Second World War. The reviewing stand, crowded with British fascists, features the slogan of "Germany and England -- a community of race." Even more unsettling than this image is the film's courageously appropriate assertion that fascism is possibly anywhere.

THE WEST: REBELS, MAOISTS, AND THE NEW GODARD
- PART ONE -

FILMS



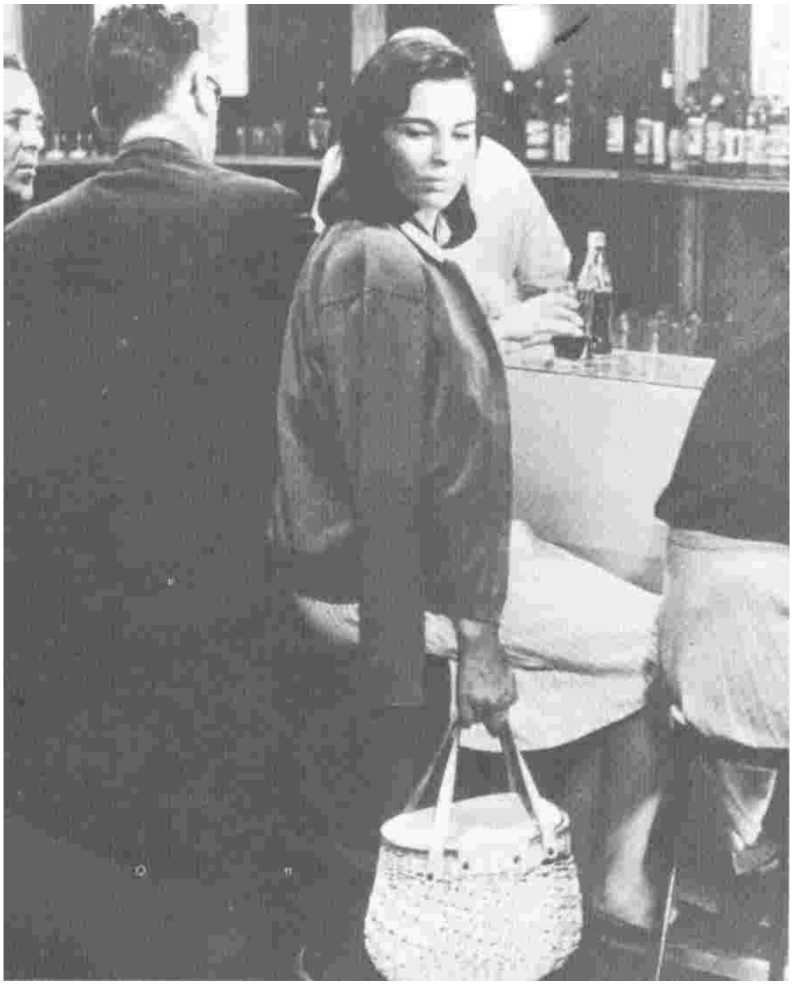
THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

(Gille Pontecorvo, Italy, 1966) (F)

Confrontation between Algerian nationalists and French army during the Algerian civil war. high-contrast photography, hand-held camera, slightly blurred motion in foreground gives this moment the ambience of an authentic newsreel shot; yet it was entirely staged.

Because of its perfect fusion of form and content, this is one of the most strikingly successful subversive films ever made. Its revolutionary fervor -- though subtly muted by a compassionate humanism that embraces both camps -- is pure and passionate. Without Pontecorvo's control over his plastic material, however, it would have remained ineffectual. Incredibly, this huge "documentary" of the Algerian struggle against the French -- street battles, bombings, riots, mass strikes, assassinations -- was entirely staged, and made to resemble authentic newsreel shots by the use of high-contrast, high-grade film stock, handheld cameras, and intentional jump-cuts. The cruelty of torture, the arrogance of the fascist French paratroopers, the escalating terrorism and mutual reprisals, plots and counterplots mount to a masterful final sequence of poetic symbolism: the Algerian masses, leaderless after the destruction of the National Liberation

Front, once again surge into the streets in a spontaneous, powerful demonstration, reaffirming that the will to freedom does not die. Their confrontation with the French military is classic in concept and execution and reminiscent of early Soviet cinema: the steady, drum-like chants for independence of the swaying possessed mass, the young woman with flags, the soldiers slowly retreating, the music reaching towards a crescendo but symbolically ending before the final beat.



THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS

(Gille Pontecorvo, Italy, 1966) (F)

The guerilla fighter minutes before the bomb in her handbag will explode in this crowded French cafe. As she glances around, we experience the moral issue: these people (innocent? guilty?) including women and children, will die by her hand. She does not hesitate, but her glance reaffirms her humanity and anguish.

THE BELLS OF SILESIA
(DAS UNHEIL)

(Peter Fleischmann, West Germany, 1972) (F)

This obsessional, pessimistic work about present-day Germany by implication extends its pervasive hatred

of bourgeois values to the entire world. Beginning as a study of a young man's neurosis, it ends by declaring him sane in an insane world. Priests, teachers, capitalists, and police are seen as integral parts of a mindless ruling class; the compromises, cowardice, and undigested Nazism of the older generation are as mercilessly portrayed as the vapidity and provincialism of the young. An abrupt narrative style -- with scenes frequently starting or ending in the middle of the action -- permits the filmmaker to build up to an odious, cumulative ending, in which the post-war German "economic miracle" (with its encrustations of reactionary past and its absorption in consumer goods) is experienced as a nightmare from which one cannot awaken.

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BLACK PANTHERS

(Agnes Varda, USA, 1969)

A significant (now tragically nostalgic) memento of America's militant Black movement of the sixties -- its leaders, its meetings, its prisoners -- by the distinguished French woman director. Sympathetically observing an American phenomenon, she correctly senses its universal aspects.

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THE BRIG

(Jonas Mekas, USA, 1964)

Caged men, under glaring lights, fearfully at attention; the Living Theatre's brutal documentary portrayal of life in a military jail tortured the audience with its incessant, obsessive, unrelieved degradation of the men. A handheld camera, deeply involved as if a prisoner itself, transforms it into valid radical cinema, leaving the viewer drained. SC

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THE CRY OF JAZZ

(Edward Bland, USA, 1959)

Forerunner of black militancy, this angry, radical, and deliberately abrasive work (made by young Black intellectuals) explodes in passionate outbursts about the death of jazz at the hands of the Whites and the suffering of the Black race. It postulates that the Black is the conscience of America and will liberate it. An historic document.

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DEADLINE FOR ACTION

(Union Films, USA, 1948?)

This is a unique example of radical left-wing propaganda by a trade union then under Communist control (United Electrical Workers of America); it traces high prices and lay-offs to the "trustification" of Big Business and to capitalism.

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THE BICYCLE THIEF

(Vittorio de Sica, Italy, 1949) (F)

Non-professionals, actual locales, the plight of the people: this total rejection of decadent fascist cinema is at the heart of Italian Neorealism. In De Sica's humanist masterpiece, the unemployed father, unable to work because his bike has been stolen, attempts to retrieve it, but after endless heartbreak, is himself forced into stealing one to live. Caught, he is degraded in front of his son, with him throughout; instead of rejecting him, the boy takes his hand as they disappear into the multitude.

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DELAWARE

(Newsreel film collective, USA, 1968/69)

One of the best of many political films made by "Newsreel", the radical-left American film collective. This is a carefully constructed expose of the complete control exercised over the State of Delaware by Dupont, one of America's corporate giants, through its domination of schools, media, political parties and pre-eminent position within the power structure.

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EIGHT FLAGS FOR 99 CENTS

(Charles Olin, USA, 1970)

A professional, intelligent montage of brief interviews with America's so-called "silent majority", indicating that, as of 1970, Middle America was as opposed to the Vietnamese war as the anti-war movement. This is an excellent example of the non-propagandistic approach that yet serves a clear ideological (and subversive) purpose.

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AN EVIL HOUR

(Peter Wolff, USA, 1970)

A horrifying, compassionate documentary of what the Vietnamese war has done to the children. It shows pickpockets, pimps, shoeshine boys, roaming gangs, drunks, and orphans; sad, old faces; children burned by napalm, with limbs missing, festering sores, abandoned, rocking.

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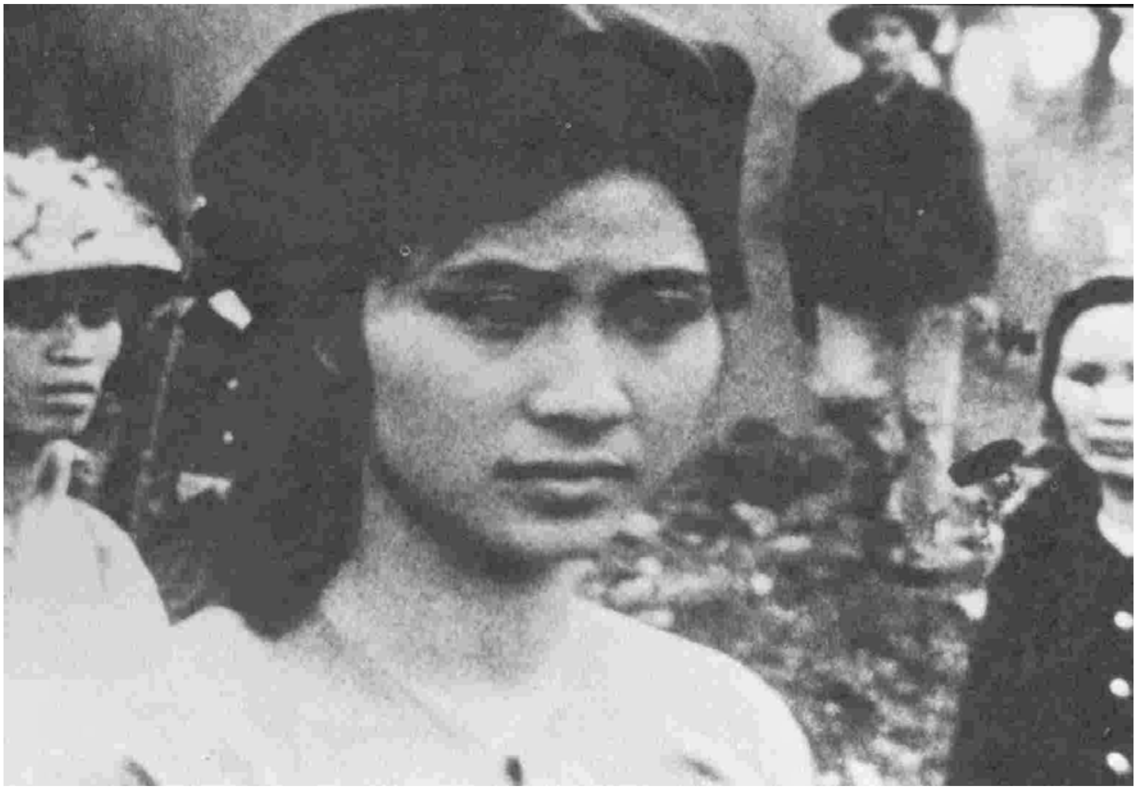

FAR FROM VIETNAM

(various directors, France, 1965)

It is possible that this newsreel image will live a very long time, for without having been staged by some "political" filmmaker, it reflects the sadness, determination, dignity, and literal "presence" of this unfortunate people. It also found its way into the anti-war film made by Resnais, Varda, Godard, Marker, Klein, Ivens and Lelouch to

show their solidarity with the North Vietnamese.

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THE GREAT SOCIETY

(Fred Mogubgub, USA, 1967?)

To the strains of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic", and at the approximate rate of one image per second, the filmmaker, without further comment, presents head-on shots of an endless barrage of American consumer goods, packed, frozen, canned or bottled.

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GUIDEBOOK TO BONN AND ENVIRONS (STADTFUHRER FUR BONN UND UMGEBUNG)

(Manfred Vosz, West Germany, 1969)

Inspired by Thorndike's similar East German films, this is a carefully researched, professionally executed indictment of the West German government bureaucracy, proving that many of its members -- individually shown and identified -- had served in the same capacity under the Nazis. A barrage of official documents, incriminating photographs and Nazi newsreels substantiate the argument.

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HANDS OVER THE CITY

(Francesco Rosi, Italy, 1963) (F)

The eternal, archetypal image, here brilliantly staged: the rioter (his cap identifying him, in Europe, as a worker) and the militia- man, trapped in an eternal ballet, surrounded by light, shadows, dust, and other violence. In this, one of the best political films of post-war Europe, the issue is housing scandals and parliamentary manipulation, all deriving from the profit motive and capitalism.

HAIL

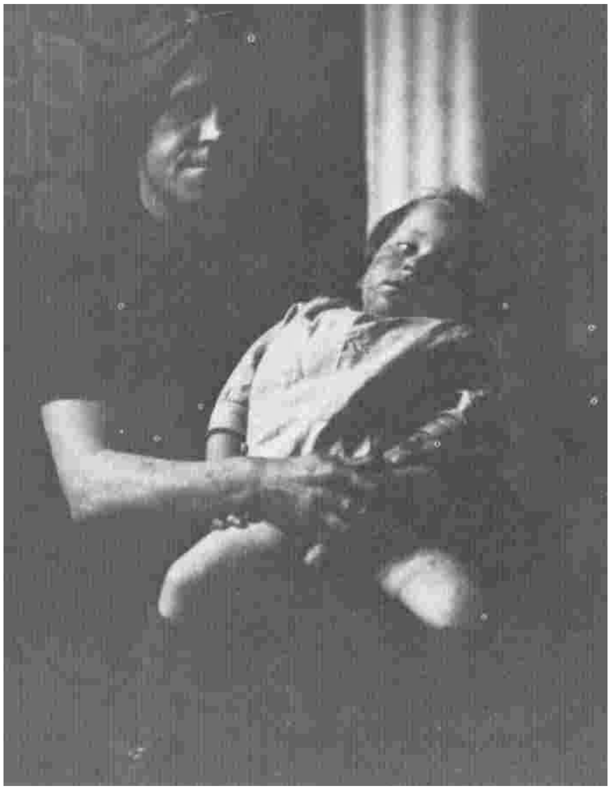
(Fred Levinson, USA, 1971) (F)

A full-scale production by a previously unknown director, very professional and elaborate. This is a fast-moving and interesting, if superficial, political fiction of an attempted *coup d'etat* against an American President moving towards fascism. The plot soon reveals the ideological shallowness of the script, with a denouement both exciting and dissatisfying; the problem of fascism is reduced to the level of individuals, and neither analysis nor context is provided. But we must be grateful to any filmmaker who reassures us that the American eagle appears on the doors of Presidential toilets. SC

THE HAMBURG OCTOBER 1923 INSURRECTION (DER HAMBURGER AUFSTAND OCTOBER 1923)

(Reiner Etz, Gisela Tuchtenhagen,
Klaus Wildenhahn, West Germany, 1972)

Unlike fictional portrayals of revolutionary problems, this fascinating cinema verite study presents a factual record of the abortive 1923 Communist *coup* by introducing 20 survivors, now in their seventies and still Communists. It is an important experience for once to confront Germans of an age-group usually considered hopelessly compromised and to discover anti-fascists discussing the class struggle. This moving tribute by a new generation to an old is nothing less than an attempt at a radical history lesson for the young, marred by its lack of analysis of Stalinism.



BORINAGE

(Joris Ivens and Henri Storck, Belgium. 1933)

Seldom has proletarian poverty been so brutally seen as in this pro-Communist documentary classic of a Belgian miners' strike in the 30s. Intentionally eschewing the "aesthetic", the filmmakers nevertheless cannot resist an "unconscious" structuring of this shot: the lighting, sadness, and positioning of the child and the mother's worn, protective hand.

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HOG CALLING BLUES

(Neal Pace, USA, 1969)

Unlike slick propaganda films or carefully manufactured political indictments, this is a cry of anguish by the young filmmaker at Vietnam and the Kent State University killings of anti-war students by the military. Two young men first decorate a dead pig, placed on an American flag, and then (with disjointed expressions of anger, impotence, anguish) remove its eyes, cut off its ears, furiously smash into it with an axe. Finally, shoving the flag into the carcass from behind, they cut off its head: "The Pig Is Dead".

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ICE

(Robert Kramer, USA, 1970) (F)

This film coolly extrapolates twenty years into the American future to discover urban guerillas in the streets and glass-and-

marble buildings of New York, at war against a fascist regime. A microcosm of personalities, trends, and problems of today's New Left projected into a very possible future, the film deals with regional offensives, assassinations, terror and counter-terror, dedication, weariness, betrayal. Directed by a leader of the radical-left documentary film group "Newsreel", it also hints at the human limitations of its heroes and displays an ideologically interesting ambiguity (if not sadness) toward them; significantly, all talk about ideas and causes has been superseded by discussions of tactics and terror, as if the revolution was merely a matter of efficient technology. The ultimate irony is that the film was financed by the very official, Hollywood-backed American Film Institute.

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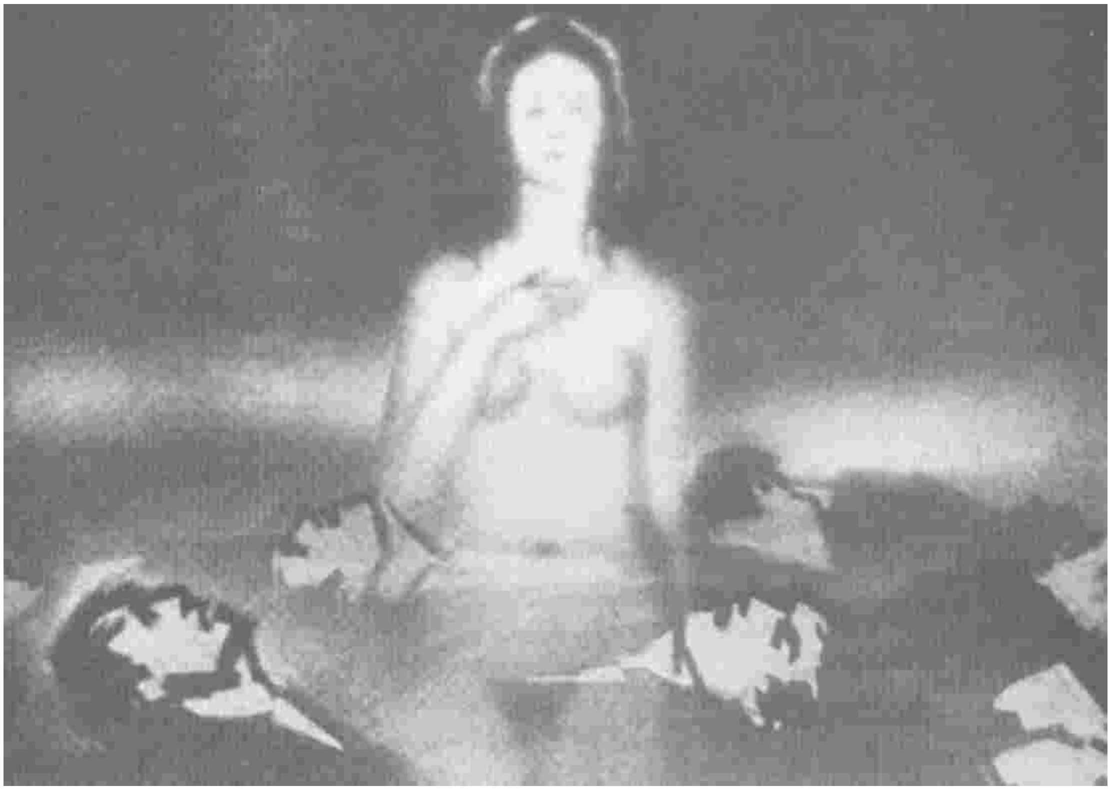

THE IDEA

(Berthold Bartosch, France, 1931)

Based on Frans Mesareel's famed woodcuts, this animated film classic was the first trick film with a radical film: a revolutionary idea (in the shape of a nude woman) is conceived by the artist, condemned by the world, the rich, and the church, but lives on, forever stirring men to revolt.

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I'M A MAN

(Peter Rosen, USA, 1969)

In a symbolic gesture towards self-realization

and manhood, a highly sophisticated American Black militant walks through New Haven in African tribal costume, brandishing a huge spear, and forcing Whites -- for the first time, he feels -- to react to him instead of vice versa: the experiment's originality becomes evident in cinema verite confrontations and interviews.

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I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU ALL MY LOVE

(Jerrold Peil, USA, 1971)

US Navy footage permits us to participate in Vietnam bombing runs, as the plane's camera follows the inexorable trajectory of air-to-surface rockets to their destination: the huts, woods, people of Vietnam. Combined with a rock love ballad, the eerie shots of bombs bursting like brilliant orange flowers give the film a visually pornographic quality.

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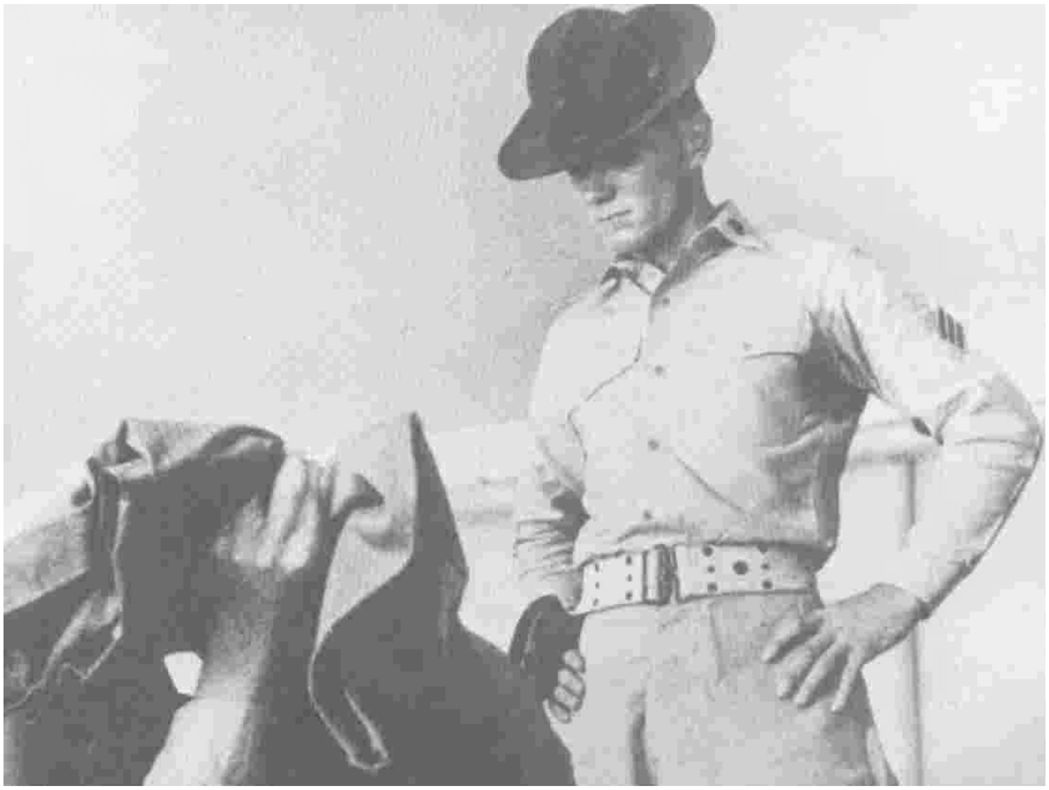

LES MARINES

(Francois Reichenbach, Franc, 1957)

A Marine sergeant towers over an anonymous recruit, an appropriate image from a terrifying documentary about the training of American Marines, made by a French director with inexplicable Department of Defense permission. Brutalization, systematic destruction of willpower, sadism: incipient fascism.

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LAND WITHOUT BREAD
(LAS HURDES)

(Luis Bunuel, Spain, 1932)

It "seems" to be -- and is -- a "documentary": in this case of a part of Spain so impoverished as to approach barbarism. But the film was made by Bunuel and, to convey the truth that must be seared into our consciousness, he spares us nothing. A donkey is attacked by bees and dies -- they settle on his now blank eyes; skeleton-like children in rags; cretins, the product of inbreeding; a dying girl lying at the edge of the road (as in the Nazi documentary, *Warsaw Ghetto*); men emigrating to find work and returning empty-handed; an entire family in one bed; and the luxurious, ornate church that dominates the town. The counterpoint of (intentionally) flat, maudlin narration and horrifying images further intensifies the truly subversive attack on our consciousness. SC

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MICKEY MOUSE IN VIETNAM

(Lee Savage, USA, 1968)

In this one-minute film, Mickey joins the army, arrives in Vietnam and is immediately killed. The destruction of this national symbol -- in itself subversive -- also implies the destruction of the American myth by the Vietnam War.

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THE MURDER OF FRED HAMPTON

(Mike Gray, USA, 1971)

The harsh, unshaded light cruelly exposes the illusion of a society of law and order, for in this sad room, a Black Panther leader was assassinated by the police, whose fabricated stories of self-defense collapsed under later public scrutiny. Hollywood cannot duplicate the sordid mattress, the machine-gun holes torn into the cheap clapboard wall.

This hard-hitting documentary expose of the police assassination of the Black Panther leader dispenses with narrative or editorial comment to make its damning case by purely audio-visual means instead: interviews with police, black revolutionaries, the State Prosecutor (later implicated), and detailed examinations of the apartment where Hampton was killed. The introduction of animated lettering at the end, consisting of rapidly emerging quotes from Hampton's last speech (as he is heard delivering it), is one of the most powerful and radical uses of this device in cinema.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

THE WEST - PART TWO

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

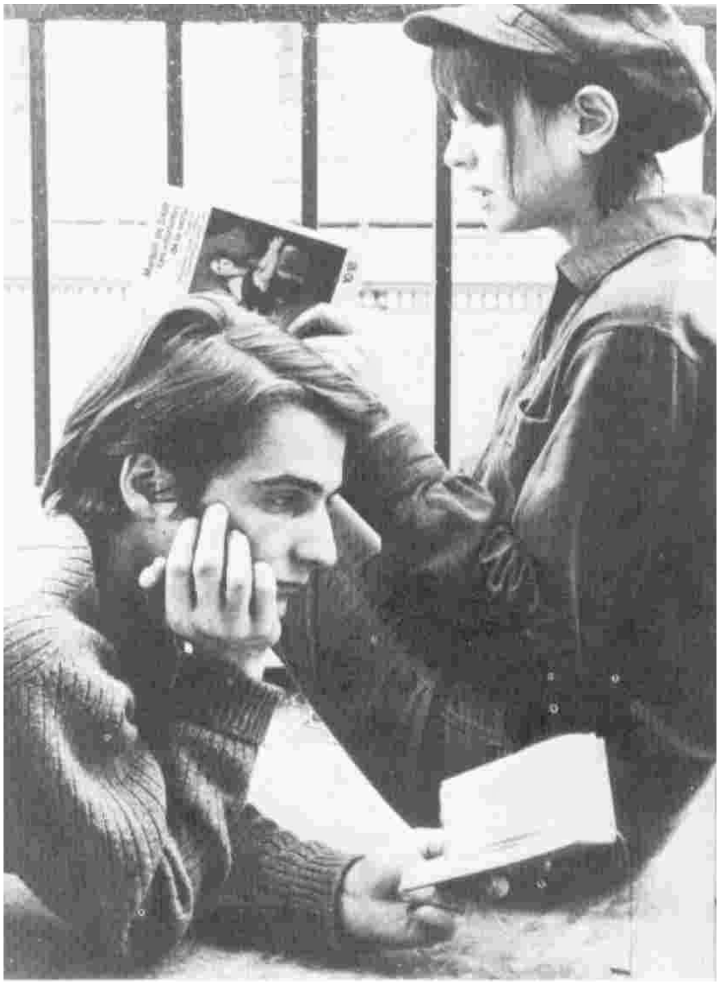
MR. FREEDOM

(William Klein, France, 1970) (F)

This anti-American satire recounts the spectacularly unheroic exploits of "Mr. Freedom", personification of the American Superman sent into the world to liberate it from Communism. The combination of sex and politics seems irresistable to modern left-wing sophisticates.

THE WEST: REBELS, MAOISTS, AND THE NEW GODARD
- PART TWO -

FILMS



LA CHINOISE

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1967) (F)

The Marquis de Sade and Mao's Little Red Book: the sophistication of Western radical thought and the oversimplifications implicit in the format of the other text also determine the parameters of Godard's ideological confusions, so painfully and beautifully revealed in one of his best films. SC

O DREAMLAND

(Lindsay Anderson, Great Britain, 1953)

Unsparing candid-camera work and astute juxtaposition of natural sound provide a scathing, angry and wordless comment on modern popular culture as seen at a British amusement park. No attempt is made to poke fun at the people shown; they are portrayed as victims -- Orwell's 1984 "proles". A visual and aural barrage of cheap pleasures and angry social comment by the later famous director of *If* and *O Lucky Man*.

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PALESTINE

(Nick McDonald, USA, 1971)

An honest, very personal statement by a New Left anti-Zionist filmically equates the dispossession of the American Indian with that of the Palestinean Arabs and points to strong similarities between democratic aspirations in the American Constitution and the program of El Fatah.

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THE PEOPLE AND THEIR GUNS (LE PEUPLE ET SES FUSILS)

(Joris Ivens and film collective, France, 1967) (F)

Perhaps the purest Western example of a Maoist film, this is a heavily didactic "agit-prop" portrayal of Laos' struggle against American Imperialism. Unfortunately, the endless succession of lengthy titles (consisting entirely of political exhortations and slogans) and the trite, passive visuals of Laotian peasants and countryside, bring on an overwhelming numbness and raise fundamental questions as to the intended audience: entirely too elementary for bourgeois liberals or radical intellectuals, the extend and nature of the language employed seems beyond whatever worker and peasant audience the filmmaker might have had in mind. What emerges clearly is his subconsciously patronizing attitude towards them, very different from the non-propagandist honesty of good political films (such as *Troublemakers*); for here "the people", when allowed to look more than heroic or suffering, move like puppets and utter nothing but the most intricate and abstruse slogans (however accurate) and every dialogue is a direct replica of the suffocatingly "official" style of Peking or Moscow newspapers. In short, the film is so determinedly "ulitarian" as to be of use to no one.

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PRAVDA

(Jean-Luc Godard and Dziga Vertov group, France, 1969) (F)

With this film, clandestinely shot in Czechoslavakia after the Russian occupation, Godard moves yet another step towards realizing his concept of "Revolutionary Cinema". Aesthetically, the distance between this film and *Weekend* is as great as that between *Weekend* and *Breathless*, yet the same radical impulse motivates all three. Godard is moving towards a visually minimal cinema, with the soundtrack assuming ever greater importance. Pravda consists of an imaginary discussion between Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, the German revolutionary; clearly influenced by Maoist ideology, it simultaneously attacks the "revisionist" Russians for invading Czechoslavakia and the "revisionist" Czechs for opening the doors to Western imperialism via Pan-Am, CBS, Hertz, American-owned

hotels, and *Playboy*. This bitter and dogmatic work reveals once again the restless originality of its creator; but as it is designed to advance the cause of revolution, it must be judged in terms of ideological relevance, efficacy, and truth. Here its indictment of the Czech reform movement seems particularly untenable, while the visuals have lost all resonance and no longer display the sophistication of early Godard.

-

PUNISHMENT PARK

(Peter Watkins, Great Britain, 1971) (F)

The British director of *The War Game* offers a radical film about America's future. Based on the President's power, under the 1950 McCarran Internal Security Act, to set up detention camps for the radical Left in case of an insurrection, this "allegory in the form of a documentary" postulates a situation, some years hence, in which revolutionaries are confined without due legal recourse and given the choice of either serving 15 years in a concentration camp, or 3 days in a special "punishment park". Here they must attempt, on foot and without water, to reach an American Flag, situated about 50 miles away in an arid desert landscape, while pursued (and if possible, trapped) by police and National Guard; if they reach their goal, they are free; if not, they must serve their sentence. While the tension -- created by montage and a very mobile camera -- is unrelenting, this ultimately emerges more as a political horror film than a serious statement. Though the existence of as yet empty concentration camps has been confirmed in the American press, the sadistic game and the device of the park seem arbitrary and artificial, limiting the radical potential of the film instead of broadening it. SC

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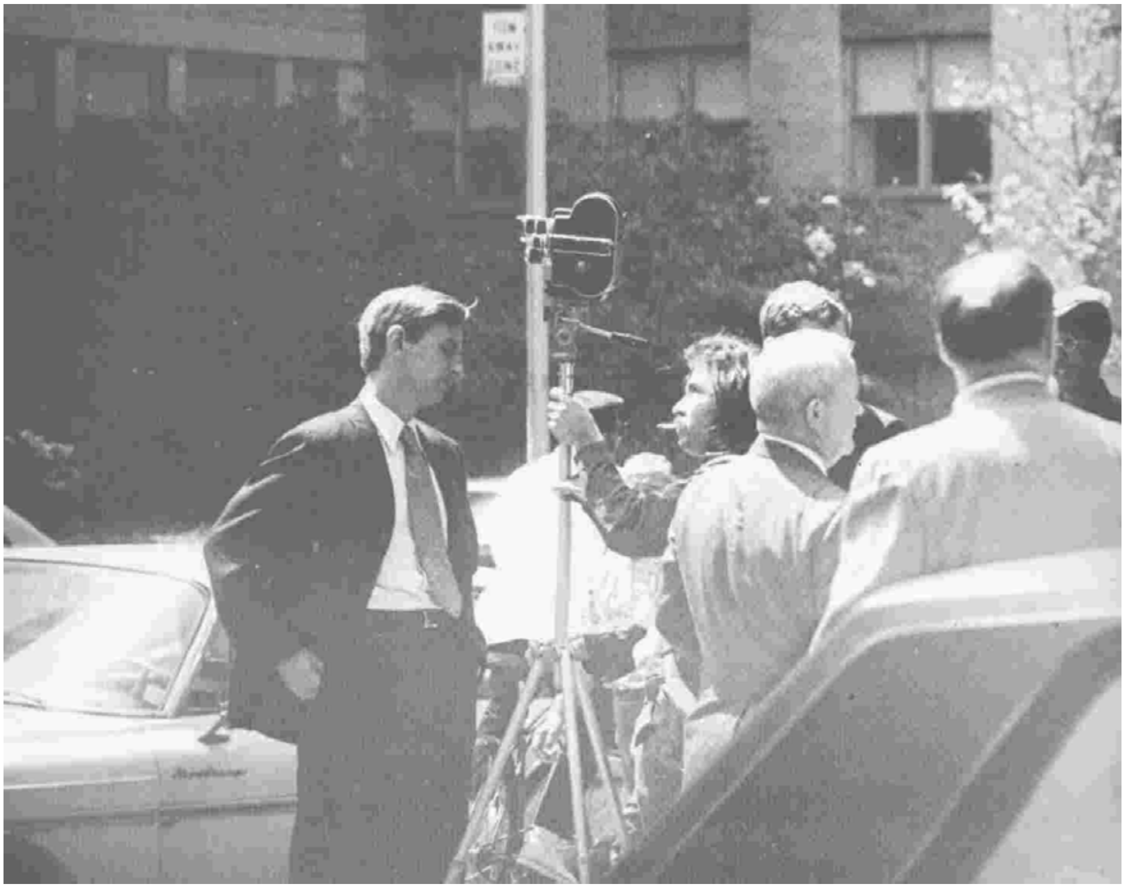

RED SQUAD

(Howard Blatt and Steve Fishler, USA, 1972)

A disturbed FBI agent, legally unable to stop the radical filmmaker from photographing agents entering FBI headquarters, decides to stand in front of the camera; the filmmaker non-chalantly raises it above his head. An extraordinary political film, in which the spies -- Red Squad and undercover police assigned to infiltrate the American Left -- are in turn spied upon. The result: a photographic expose of faces and agents in action, fully identified by name and title.

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THE REVOLUTIONARY WAS A COP

(Marc Weiss, USA, 1971)

In a series of interviews with young American SDS radicals, the activities of an agent provocateur in their midst are discussed, including his organizing new SDS branches and proposing bomb plots. The film is based on an actual case history. In the subsequent trial, the SDS members were convicted, the provocateur freed. The director, on camera, accuses him at the end.

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RECRUITS IN INGOLSTADT

(PIONIERE IN INGOLSTADT)

(Rainer Werner Fassbinder, West Germany, 1971) (F)

A welcome surprise from the director of Munich's famed "anti-theatre", whose films -- at least two or three per year -- are attracting growing international attention. This is a stylized, anti-bourgeois satire of small-town girls and young soldiers who build a bridge that leads nowhere and is never finished. The cool, sophisticated tenor of this film, its strangely clipped dialogue (delivered in flat, Brechtian monotone), and its desperate, maimed protagonists ultimately offer a curiously moving metaphor of a post-atomic, shell-shocked generation; they seem to talk in a human way, but suddenly "go off"; they rarely look at each other, but address the camera instead; and though some attempt to imitate the "Schweinehund" jargon of the Nazi period and its blustering pseudo-masculinity, they do so without conviction. The men have become unfeeling robots; if any hope is left, it is with the downtrodden girls who still exhibit glimmerings of human feeling.

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ROBERT WALL, EX-FBI AGENT

(Michael Anderson, Paul Jacobs, Saul Landau, Bill Yahrans, USA, 1972)

An ex-agent who resigned after five years with the FBI, discusses how the Bureau works, how its agents see themselves and their jobs, and why he believes the FBI to be a repressive force. He explains how he organized a fraudulent smear campaign against Stokely Carmichael, forged letters designed to disrupt relations between the Blacks and the Left, and helped plant informers in radical groups.

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THE SORROW AND THE PITY

(Marcel Ophuls, Switzerland, 1971) (F)

A former Wehrmacht officer, now a smiling, prosperous German burgher free of unfashionable guilt, recounts his wartime "activities" in France in one of the many interviews with resistance fighters, collaborators, statesmen, and reactionaries. Neither patronizing nor simplistic, this film raises eternal questions about collaboration and resistance; Vietnam is not too far. SC

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SAINT MICHAEL HAD A ROOSTER (SAN MICHELE AVEVE UN GALLO)

(Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Italy, 1971) (F)

A group of idealistic, impractical 19th-century anarchists mount a disastrous terrorist attack on an irrelevant town hall; their failure leads to the 10-year imprisonment of the leader, during which -- in a painful *tour de force* -- he succeeds in mastering mind and body with a vengeance to prepare himself for future revolutionary action. Alas, a tragic, ironic denouement indicates that these fantasies of leadership, projected during years of isolation, do not suffice for a new generation of revolutionaries.

-

SEE YOU AT MAO

(Jean-Luc Godard and Dziga Vertov group, France, Great Britain, 1969) (F)

This uncompromising attempt at revolutionary cinema marked a new stage in the aesthetic evolution of one of the medium's most radical experimentors. Believing narrative cinema to be outdated and bourgeois, Godard loosed a propagandistic audio-visual barrage on the senses which combined Maoism, the Beatles, multiple soundtracks, minimal cinema *ala* Warhol, nudity (accompanied by a Women's Liberation statement), and quotes from Nixon, Pompidou, and the Communist Manifesto. Possibly the director's most disturbing work so far, it ended with a blood-spattered hand painfully reaching for a red flag. But it is questionable whether boredom, didactic harangues, reductionist cinema, and lifeless images actually serve the revolutionary purposes the filmmaker aspires to; even more uncertain is the nature of the intended audience.

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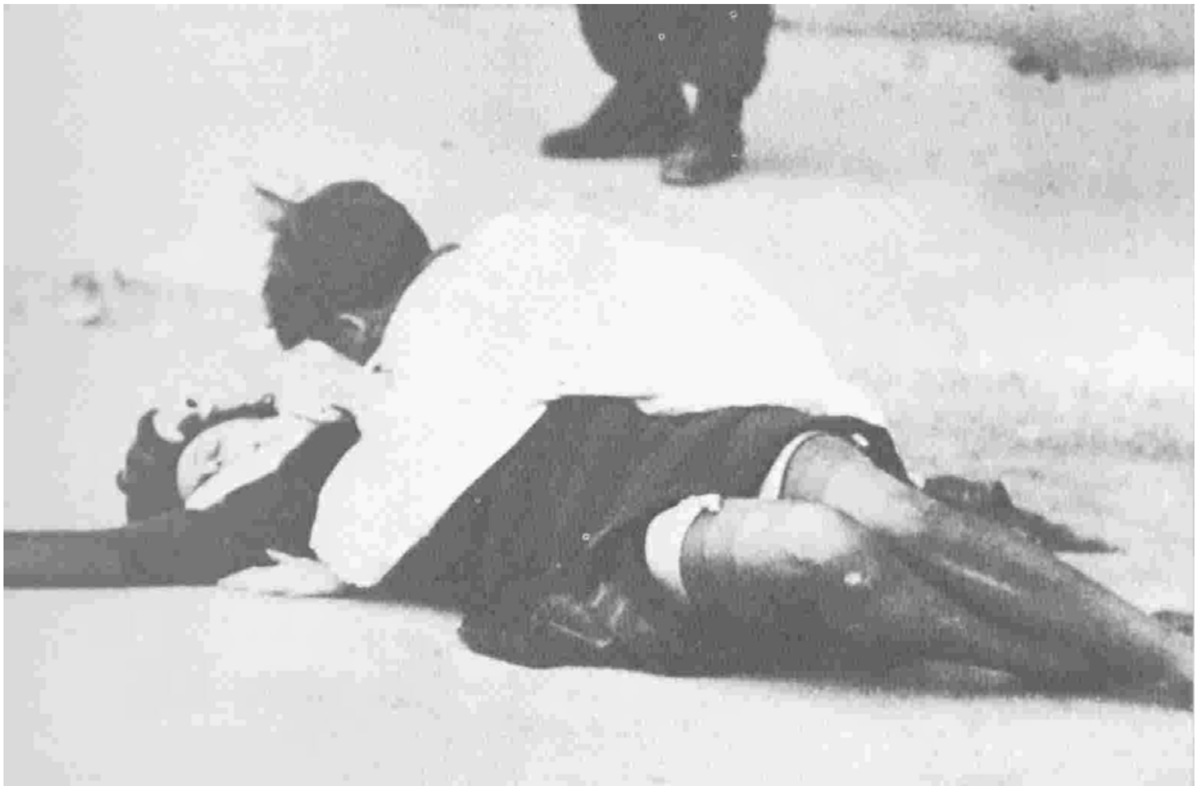

OPEN CITY

(Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1945) (F)

Authenticity, immediacy, rejection of studio "slickness" (Hollywood would have rearranged the skirt), concern with the underdog: the legacy of Italian Neorealism. Here a simple woman of the people (played by the then-unknown Anna Magnani) dies a sudden death at the hands of the Gestapo, casually portrayed as part of the Nazi's everyday brutality.

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THE SPANISH EARTH

(Joris Ivens, USA, 1937) (F)

Ivens records the agony of the Spanish civil war in one of his

strongest films. Its images of destruction -- accompanied by Hemingway's narration -- shocked a world not yet used to the horrors of a 2nd World War or Vietnam.

SPAIN 68
(ESPANA 68)

(Unitelefilm Collective, Italy, 1968)

A secretly shot documentary about the huge (and officially denied) student demonstrations and university occupations in Spain in 1968. It is startling to hear revolutionary songs chanted by masses of students and a professor extol socialism at an illegal mass meeting in the context of present-day Franco Spain.

THE SUDDEN WEALTH OF THE POOR PEOPLE OF KOMBACH
(DER PLOTZLICHE REICHTUM DER ARMEN LEUTE VON KOMBACH)

(Volker Schloendorff, West Germany, 1971) (F)

A Jew as mastermind of a 19th-century peasant conspiracy against the rich: a daring reintroduction of the Jew into German dramaturgy by a young

director who has predictably been accused of anti-semitism; for this image is still in the nature of a taboo and many cannot yet cope with it.

An excellent example of a particularly interesting new genre of young German cinema; bizarre, deadly serious variations on the reactionary German "Heimat" films of yore -- those insufferable, sentimental "kitsch" prosodies to Fatherland, Soil, and Family. This fully realized work effectively upsets this tradition by recounting a tale of oppressed 19th-century German peasants who become rebels against the state out of poverty, revealing (instead of romanticizing) the brutal degradation of German rural life at the time. Particularly audacious is the presence of an itinerant Jew peddler as mastermind (!) of the conspiracy, predictably leading to (unfounded) charges of anti-semitism against a young director who has dared to reintroduce the Jew into German dramaturgy.

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SUNDAY

(Dan Drasin, USA, 1961)

After almost two decades of Sunday folk-singing in New York's Washington Square Park, a new law suddenly prohibited the practice. This historic documentary records the confrontations between massed police and the folksingers, ending in the latter's victory and the rescinding of the law. Handheld cameras, improvisations, and a sense of passion and commitment create a film of revolt in action that is of lasting value.

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SUSAN AFTER THE SUGAR HARVEST

(Peter Robinson, USA, 1971)

An in-the-kitchen interview with a young American girl just back from cutting sugar cane in Cuba, turns into a moving, thought-provoking discussion of the differing value systems of the two civilizations and indicates how the girl's consciousness was changed by the experience. As she prepares sandwiches for herself and the filmmaker, we also get a glimpse of her uncorrupted idealism.

-

MODERN TIMES

(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1936) (F)

A red flag -- used to warn passing traffic of a protruding object -- falls off a truck, Chaplin picks it up to return it, thereby becoming unintended leader of striking workers who follow him because of the flag. This scene was banned in several countries. SC

-

THREE LIVES

(Kate Millet, USA, 1971) (F)

Photographed by an all-female crew and directed by the author of Sexual Politics, these are aut0biographical interviews with three very different women who talk frankly about their lives, conflicts, and contrasting lifestyles. A proud and uncompromising film.

-

TROUBLEMAKERS

(Robert Machover and Norman Fruchter, USA, 1966) (F)

One of the best works of the American Left, this is a hard-hitting example of a new kind of political film which avoids both cliches and propaganda. It concentrates instead on careful exploration of the problems encoun-

tered by the young SDS militants (including Tom Hayden, then unknown, later a leader of the movement) in organizing the Black Ghetto in Newark around community issues and simultaneously radicalizing them. The painful, difficult experiment ends in failure, honestly confronted by an honest film, leaving the viewer with the implicit suggestion that the attempt must be made again; this time perhaps in the direction of revolution rather than reform.

-

12-12-46

(Bernard Stone, USA, 1966)

A pretty, very American co-ed tells us her life story in a magnificent series of petty-bourgeois platitudes which an evil filmmaker cross-cuts with images of war, governmental stupidity, and crime, to tell the true story of her era. The girl's exuberant ignorance carries the film.

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THE YOUNG AND THE DAMNED (LOS OLVIDADOS)

(Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1951)

In an unjust society, even the poor are corrupt and violent, says a non-sentimental Bunuel in what is perhaps his strongest attack on contemporary society. Here a blind beggar is attacked by slum children; this, too, is the price of poverty, says the filmmaker and demolishes our hypocritical taboo against showing such incidents. SC

VALPARAISO, VALPARAISO

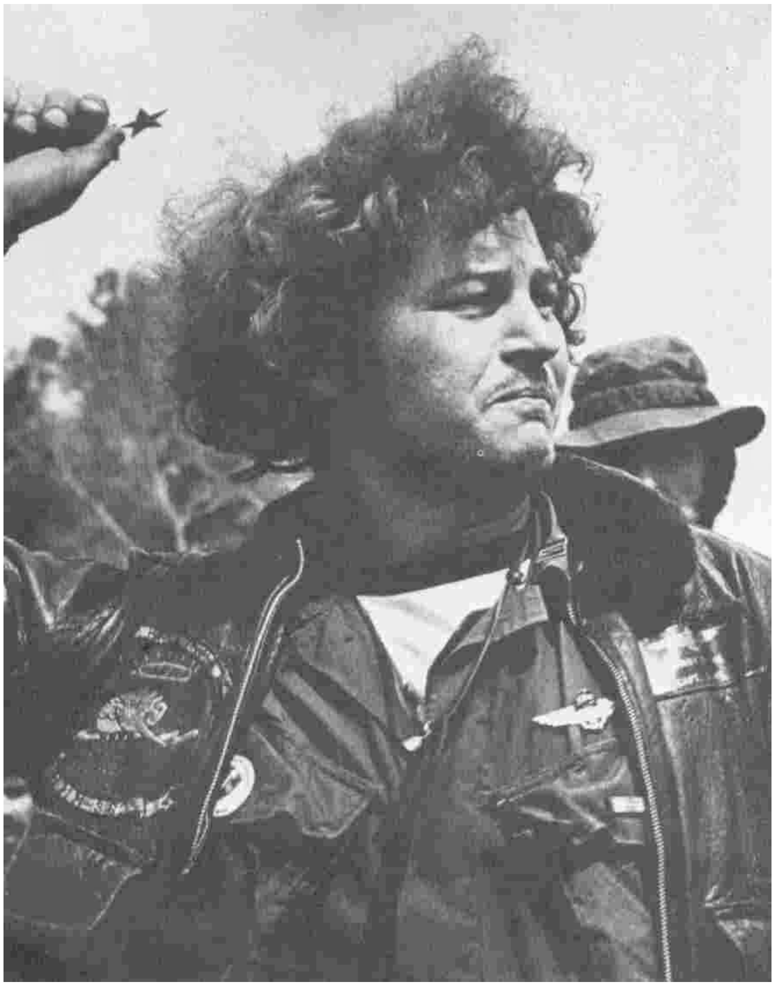
(Pascal Aubier, France, 1971) (F)

This film constitutes a satirical attack (from the Left) on drawing-room left intellectuals and assorted Maoists. Its hero, Alain Cluny, famed "radical" author, waxes eloquent at elegant parties about "revolution as a work of art", is a specialist on surrealism, and finds beauty even in slums. Convinced by a group of Maoist buffoons, con-men, and bunglers to "deepen his commitment", he accepts a mysterious assignment to foment revolution in Valparaiso -- the place most removed from France -- and spends the rest of the film in a futile, burlesque attempt to get there. Slapstick tortures, intricate seductions, and marvellously sophisticated dialogue, keep laughs and action going, but the film ultimately becomes entangled in ideological confusion, too complex a plot and stylistic wavering between realist satire and comic strip.

WHOLLY COMMUNION

(Peter Whitehead, Great Britain, 1965)

In 1965, in London's Royal Albert Hall, Ferlinghetti, Corso, Horovitz, Ginsberg, and Logue speak out against the Vietnam war in a moving and historic poetry reading attended by thousands.



WINTERSOLDIER

(Winter Film Collective, USA, 1972)

During a 1971 anti-war demonstration in Washington, a veteran defiantly, disdainfully, and in anguish tears off his medal and "returns" it to the State. A moment of history is captured in a powerful image. Informal attire and hairstyle reflect a new kind of veteran.

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THE WOMAN'S FILM

(Judy Smith, Louise Alaimo, and Ellen Sorren,
San Francisco Newsreel film collective, USA, 1971)

One of the most significant and active new areas of independent film production in the last few years has been films made by (and sometimes for) women. Directed and edited by young radical feminists, this film features a series of pointed interviews with women working on jobs "both outside and inside the home", who make it clear that their problems are caused not by personal shortcomings or relational difficulties, but by the very structure of capitalist society.

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YIPPIE

(Yippie Film Collective, USA, 1968)

True to their joyfully anarchist philosophy of radical politics as "theatre", this is the Youth International Party's jaundiced view of the 1968 Democratic convention and its concomitant violent demonstrations. DeMille footage, Abbie Hoffmann, Democratic-party machine politicians, and Allen Ginsberg are cross-cut in a complex, sophisticated example of political filmmaking at its best.

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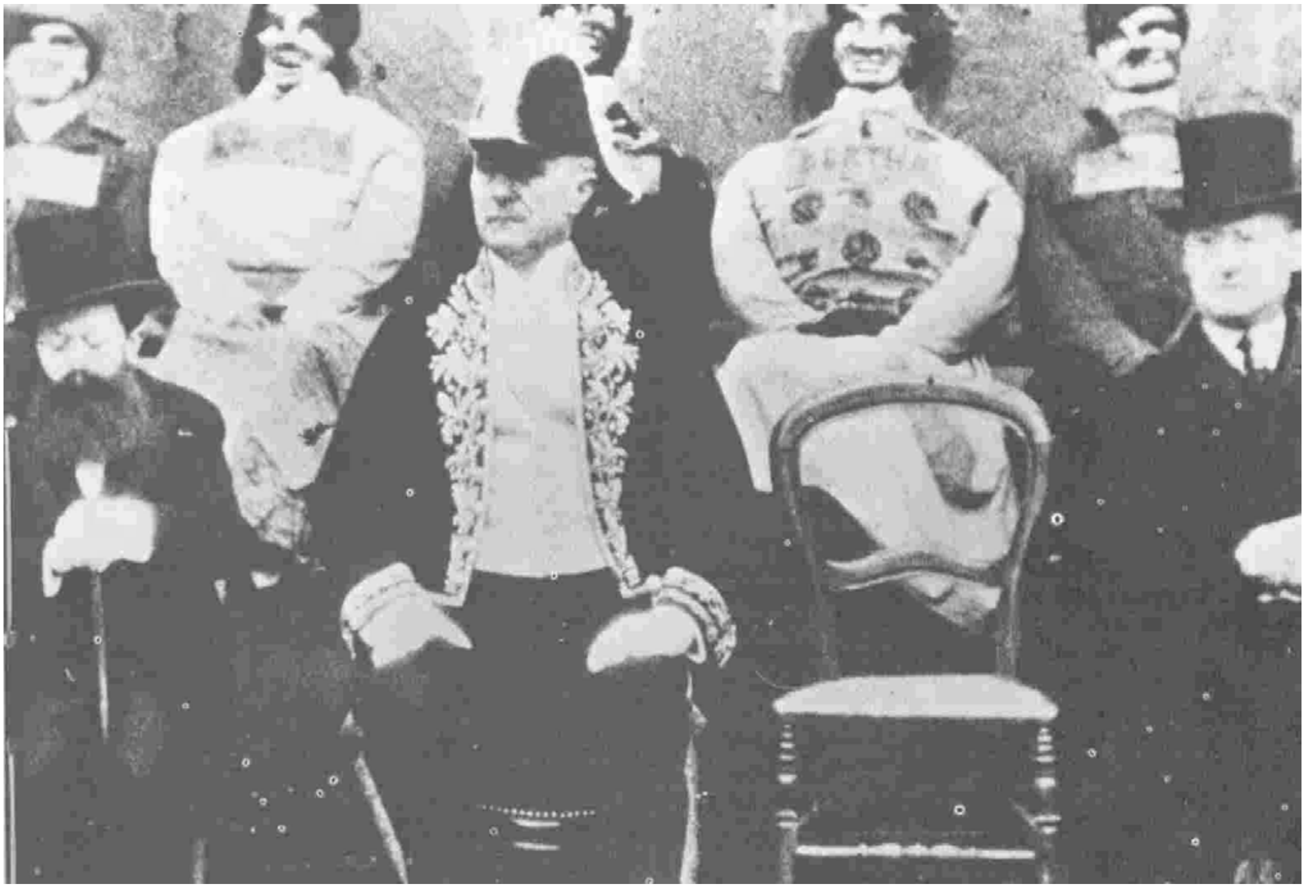
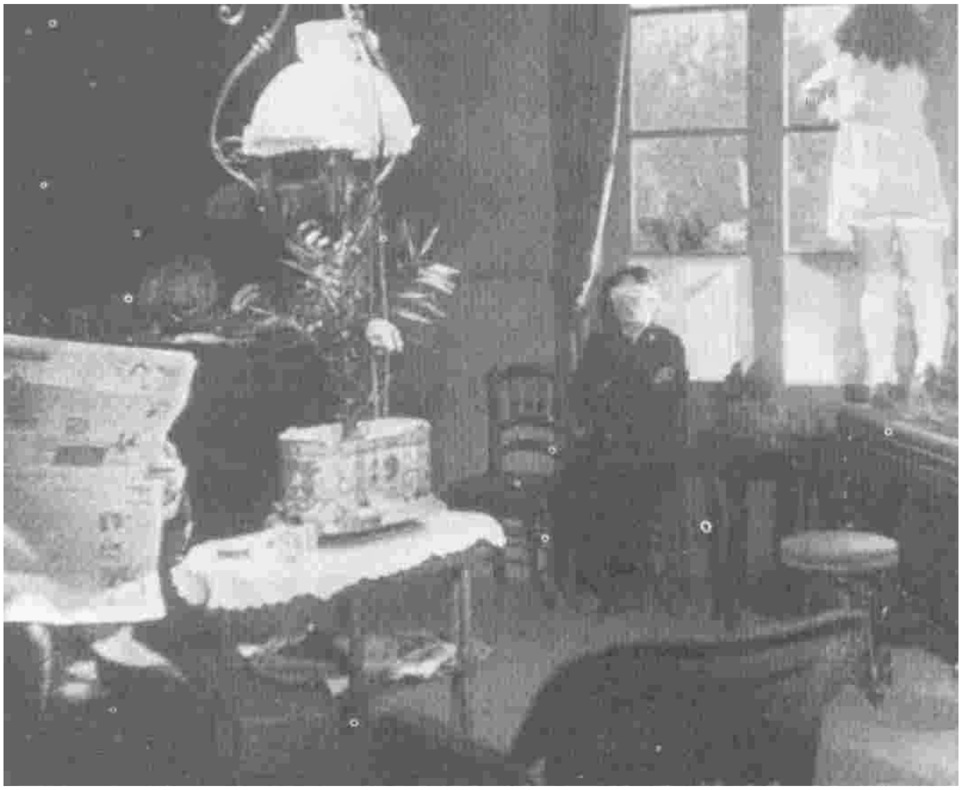


ZERO DE CONDUITE

(Jean Vigo, France, 1933)

The Establishment, as "seen" by rebellious schoolboys and anarchist filmmaker; the headmaster an odious midget. State and army as pompous buffoons, and behind them -- the true reality: grinning, ominous monster puppets. In its perfect fusion of form and content, this film remains a masterpiece of subversion.



ZERO DE CONDUITE

(Jean Vigo, France, 1933)

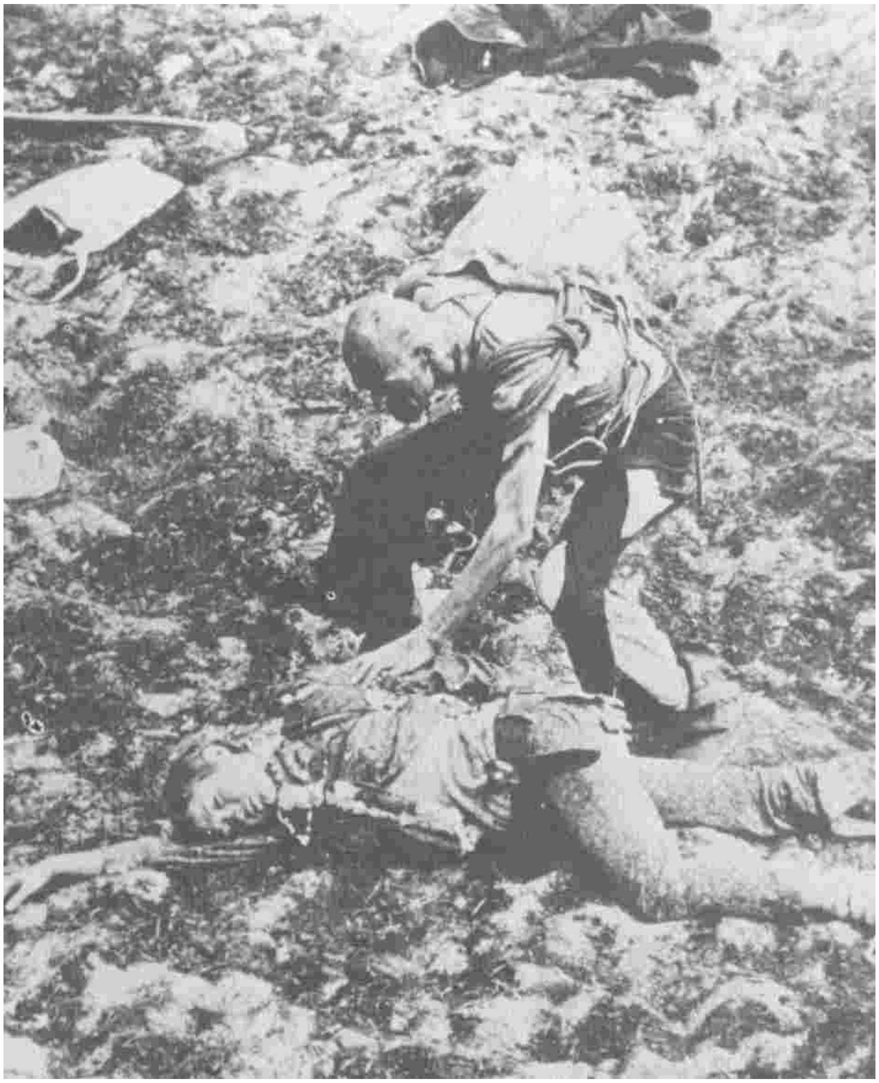
In this anarchist masterpiece -- a poetic, surreal portrayal of revolt in a boys' school -- Vigo also summarizes the suffocating atmosphere of French petty bourgeois life, seen, as the rest of the film, through a child's eyes: the pater familias who never emerges from his paper, the kitsch decor, the girl, her underwear showing; though the hero is blindfolded, we know he sees it all.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART



THE DESERTER AND THE NOMADS
(Juro Jakubisco, Czechoslavakia, 1968) (F)
In a world devastated by atomic war, Death searches the battlefield for his missing companion. The lack of contrast, the irregularly colored ground, and the gaunt profile lend a forbidding air to a powerful sequence by one of Czechoslavakia's most original talents, who in one year shifted from the playful lightheartedness of *The Critical Years* to a generalized social pessimism.

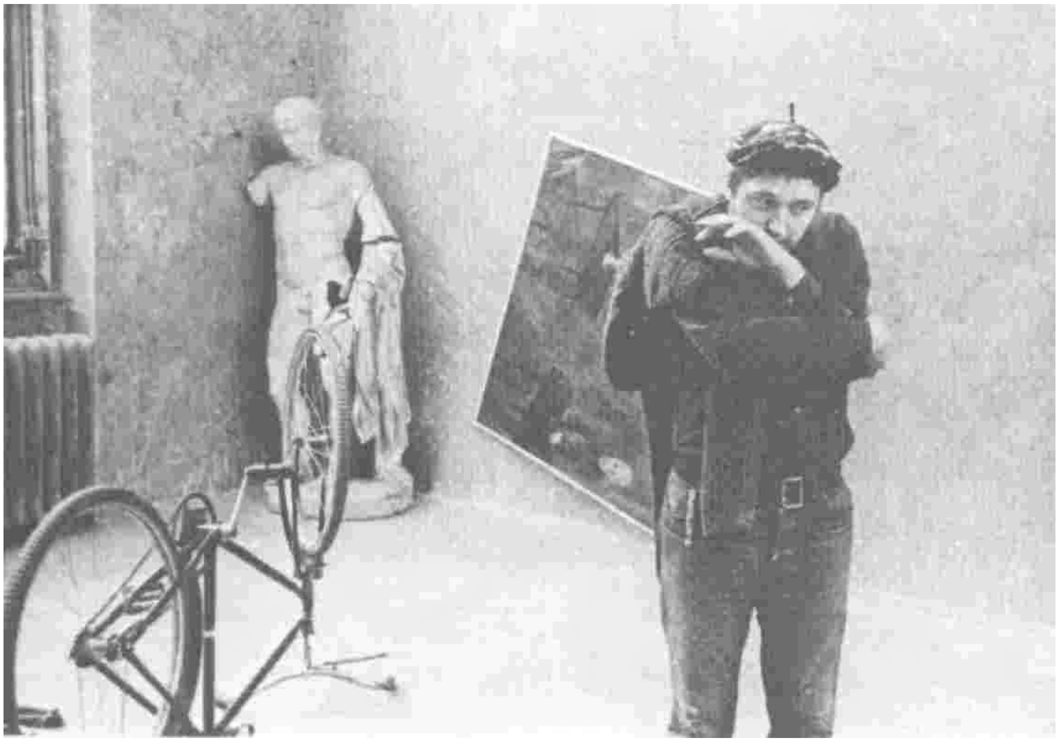
A powerful, original and obsessive work about war and death,

permeated with expressionist outrage and cosmic pessimism. In three horrifying episodes set in World Wars I, II, and III, we witness endless carnage, unmotivated death, the triumph of mindless violence, and orgies of bloodletting. One episode, dealing with Soviet Russian troops during the 2nd World War, shows them as venal, imperial, and lecherous, and ends with documentary footage of the (later) Soviet invasion of Czechoslavakia. As the tanks enter Prague, the subtitle reads: "We thought they might have been another crew also making a film." The horrifying last episode takes place in a world devastated by atomic war.

SUBVERSION IN EASTERN EUROPE: AESOPIAN METAPHORS

- PART ONE -

FILMS



THE CRITICAL YEARS

(Juro Jakubisco, Czechoslavakia, 1967)

The casualness and disorder, the satirical edge (Greek statue, tilted picture and bicycle frame), the emphasis on the individual are entirely "modern" and, in fact, Godardesque; the more surprising since this is an early example of a Czech film renaissance and represents a total break with the ossified heroics of Stalinist cinema.

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AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART, OR THE TRAGEDY OF A SWITCHBOARD OPERATOR (LJUBAVNI SLUCAJ ILI TRAGEDIJA SLUZBENICE P.T.T.)

(Dusan Makavejev, Yugoslavia, 1967) (F)

Makavejev burst upon the international film scene with this unpredictable, ironic, and erotic "love story" which in its portrayal of humanistic, personal values as against official, ossified ideology represented the new values of the Eastern young. Alternating between clever comedy and casual tragedy, it cast a tender but cruel eye on a bizarre affair between a switchboard operator and a rat exterminator, proclaiming that the ultimate values are in the fascinating trivialities and senseless moments of life. "Men live their beautiful, wild lives quite close to magnificent ideas and progressive truths. My film is dedicated to those interesting, vague, in between spaces." SC

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ALONE (MAGANY)

(Vince Lakatos, Hungary, 1969)

In recording the life and ideas of an old poverty-stricken peasant woman living alone in a ramshackle hut, the film, the producers assure us, lets us listen in to the dead traditions of the old generation. In reality, however, we seem to be confronted with a proud non-conformist perhaps even a semi-heroine in the filmmaker's eyes who knows the name Lenin only as that of a "regent".

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AMONG MEN (WUEAROD LUDZI)

(Wladyslaw Slesicki, Poland, 1962)

The most important of the famed Polish "Black Series" documentaries (at first forbidden), which dared to touch on negative aspects of "socialist" society. This is a laconic and cruel story of a stray dog living "among men", an outcast, hurt, persecuted or treated with indifference. Caught by the municipal dogcatchers, he pitifully howls for his life in a dilapidated concentration camp-like structure with, suddenly, innumerable other victims; there is an escape, but it leads him back to the same life. A film about victims and persecutors, not necessarily about dogs.

-

ANDREI ROUBLEV

(ANDREJ RUBLJOW)

(Andrei Tarkovsky, USSR, 1962-66) (F)

This secret, hitherto forbidden, epic masterpiece of the new Soviet Russian cinema for the first time connects this cinema with the golden era of Soviet film, to whose most sublime creations it has rightly been compared. More important than its massive beauty, the sensuous plasticity of its images, and extraordinary fusion of ideological, narrative, and aesthetic structure, is its message of human freedom; the pre-eminence of the suffering, questioning individual, as against the mass, of the indominable spirit of self-realization and the delineation of relations between individual and temporal power. Though the ideas are subtly presented in the most clandestine manner on a plane entirely removed from facile propaganda or human- itarian sentimentality, the Russian authorities "understood" the coded implications well enough to block the release and distribution of the film for several years.

Telling the story of a famed Russian icon painter of the 15th century, it is a film -- as none before -- that reeks with the evil odor of the Middle Ages, an era of brutality, human degradation, abject poverty, rape, senseless mass slaughter, mud and pagan orgies, when people were at the mercy of both temporal and "spiritual" powers. But the Middle Ages were also an era in which crazy peasants put on wings to fly in dreams of freedom and crashed to their death; unknown craftsmen fashioned huge church bells in agonies of creation; and artists, in infinite pain and doubt, had to find a way to themselves.

The production of a work of such scope and humanist grandeur under conditions of extreme bureaucracy and a system of censorship that breeds the most odious conformism, is an act of unprecedented self-affimation and will -- provided the film goes through normal distribution channels -- itself contribute to the inevitable transformation of consciousness that must still come in Russia. SC

... AND THE FIFTH HORSEMAN IS FEAR (A PATY JEZDEC JE STRACH ...)

(Zbynek Brynych, Czechoslavakia, 1964)

A Jew dwarfed by symbols of passing time.
The place may be Prague; the time may
be the Nazi period or the Stalinist era;
the theme is fear. A courageous allegory
that preceded the Czechoslavak "thaw".

Special note must be made of those courageous Czech films that preceded the Dubcek era, yet raised controversial questions or created embarrassing analogies. This expressionist, semi- surrealist drama of betrayal, cowardice, and heroism in a totalitarian state probes the varieties and limits of human behavior under extreme conditions in brilliantly conceived sequences of hypnotic power. Telling the story of a Jewish doctor, unexpectedly confronted with a frightful choice, it raises basic questions. The oppressors, ostensibly Nazis, wear no uniforms; the events, ostensibly occurring during the last war, in fact take place in a timeless and therefore universal reality, reinforcing the film's oppressive topicality. The locate may be Prague; the theme is fear.

THE APARTMENT (BYT)

(Jan Svankmajer, Czechoslavakia, 1968)

In this ominous, brilliantly conceived work, objects -- the unfortunate apartment dweller's world -- conspire against him; a mirror shows only the back of his head; a stove, when lit, drips water; and a soup spoon has holes in it. The axe offered him by a stranger to help him break out to freedom only reveals, on use, a second stone wall, carrying thousands of names, and a pencil, with which he slowly writes his own name: Josef K.

-

BAD LUCK

(Andrzej Munk, Poland, 1961)

The ambitious and seditious aim of this important Polish director's work was the destruction 0f false national myths. This ruthless, often Chaplinesque satire on bureaucracy, politics, and Stalinism deals wit a typical opportunist who "adjusts" to a succession of (opposing) political regimes in Poland.

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BIRDS, ORPHANS, AND FOOLS (PTACKOVE, SIROTCI A BLAZNI)

(Juro Jakubisco, France, 1971) (F)

This delirious *tour de force* of creative camera work and montage progresses through a mad universe of surrealist tableaux and

bizarre actions, with every composition a poem in design and color. Two fellows and a girl, war orphans and dropouts from organized society, attempt to live a life of freedom and innocence in a world of insanity and war, in an enchantingly ramshackle house where cupboards hang from ceilings and birds, old men, and animals wander freely. But there is desperation barely below the surface of this metaphor of Consciousness Three, and innocence cannot subsist in our world. This unconventional fantasy blends dreams and reality, tenderness and cruelty with a rather spectacular use of distortion lenses, agitated camera, special tints, visual puns, and variable screen sizes. The production of such pessimistically libertarian parables by Eastern directors -- in this case, a Slovak, temporarily working in France -- is symptomatic. Jakubisco is now back in Slovakia.

BE SURE TO BEHAVE
(A SEKAT DOBROTU)

(Peter Solan, Czechoslavakia, 1968)

It is one thing to make a fictional film in the West about unjust imprisonment in one of Stalin's jails; it was another matter to do so in Czechoslavakia, even under Dubcek, for who knew whether he would last. In this film a woman prisoner, harshly incarcerated, is suddenly released as unpredictably as she had been imprisoned; "Stalin is dead," she is told, and then, significantly, "Be sure to behave."

THE CHAIR
(FOTEL)

(Daniel Szczechura, Poland, 1963)

At a huge political gathering, a struggle for an empty seat on "The Presidium" -- shot entirely from above -- shows some of the audience in a running tackle for the honor, sabotaged by enemies, or helped by their cohorts, until one, through murder, succeeds to the Chair, immediately assuming the same protective coloration as the rest of the faceless leadership.

DAISIES
(SEDMIKRASKY)

(Vera Chytilova, Czechoslavakia, 1966) (F)

The Czech film renaissance -- subsequently killed by the Russians -- here celebrates one of its largest surprises: a mad, surreal comedy about two irresponsible girls living a life of anarchic freedom and individualism in total disregard of society; an amazing subversion of years of ossified "socialist realism"

Visually and structurally perhaps the most sensational film of the Czech film renaissance, this is a mad, stylish, dadaist comedy, long banned by the censors. It is an orgy of spectacular visual delights, sensuous decor, and magnificent color experiments, making a philosophical statement in the guise of a grotesque farce. Two dizzy young girls, bored and without any values, knowing neither past nor future, stumble through a bizarre series of change pick-ups, wild adventures, eating orgies, and pie-throwing acts. Below the exaggeration, sarcasm, and exuberance lurks a serious comment on a fraudulent style of life, played as a game in which protagonists become victims. No work from the East has ever been further removed from the drab sterility of so-called "socialist realism". The stunning photography is by Jaroslav Kucera and the script by Ester Krumbachova, whose contributions to almost all major Czech films of the period denote her key role.

DEMONSTRATIONS
(STRAHOV)

(Vera Chytilova, Czechoslavakia, 1966) (F)

A unique document from Prague, this film is an illegally made documentary of the student demonstrations in Strahov for better living conditions and of their bloody suppression by the police. The interviews with student leaders, faculty, and hospital personnel were all at considerable risk to the participants. This first illegal work from the East (where all film production is controlled by the state) could, of course, have been made only by a film professional with ready access to 35mm cameras and collaborating laboratories.

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DON QUIXOTE
(DON KIHOTE)

(Vlado Kristl, Yugoslavia, 1961)

No still can convey the hallucinatory speed, insane rhythm, and cacaphony of noise that accompany the strangely abstractified images of this historic animation. Don Quixote has become mechanized and is threatened by a technological society bent on destroying his individuality. He defeats it by expoing it to the power of art and poetry; but the art work is itself ironically distorted, raising a question mark. This film was never released in Yugoslavia; its director, unable to work freely, emigrated.

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EARLY WORKS
(RANI RADOVI)

(Zelimir Zilnik, Yugoslavia, 1969) (F)

Filmed during the political ferment of 1968, this work explores the radical impulses behind the unrest of the young in a country where the revolutionaries of an earlier generation now form the Establishment. Three young men and a beautiful girl leave home and move across the country in search of a just society and true socialism, only to discover tragically that an unfinished revolution, while changing the face of power, has failed to change the nature of man. Filled with black humor, frank sex, and bizarre tableaux, the film becomes a revolutionary allegory of the European New Left. Though it brought its director into conflict with his country's authorities, the Yugoslav courts subsequently ruled in his favor in a landmark decision.

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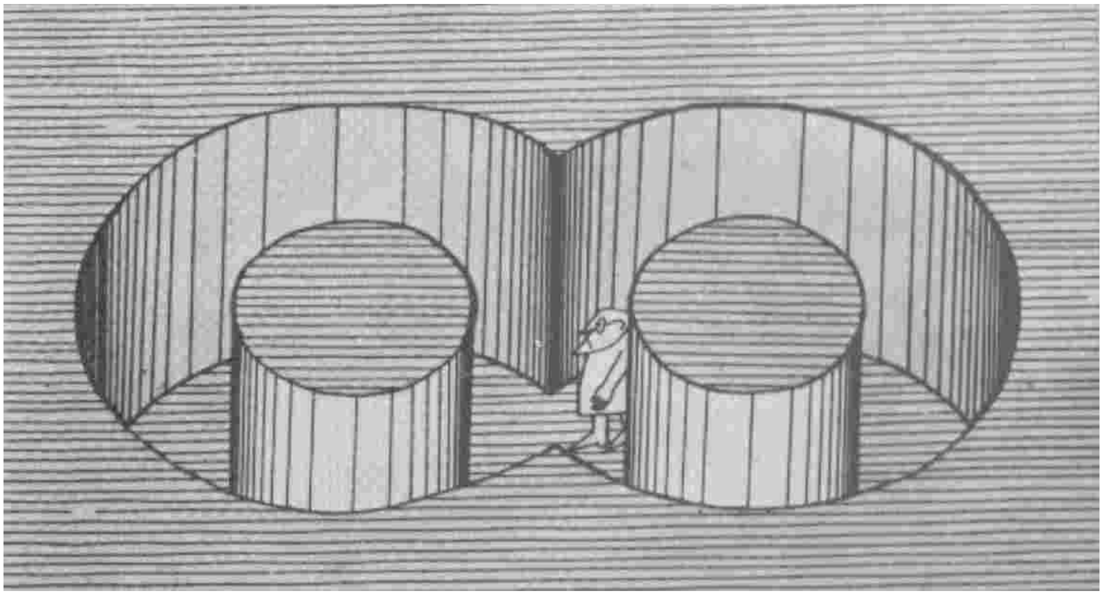

EVERYTHING IS A NUMBER

(Stefan Schabenbeck, Poland, 1967)

In this play on numbers and philosophy, the "8" becomes a gorge in an endless desert, an object lesson in creating 3-dimensionality on a 2-dimensional surface. As such, its plastic power is astonishing; and the presence of a prisoner (whose potential escape can only lead to further frustration) points beyond the film to existing realities.

FIREMAN'S BALL
(HORI MA PANENKO)

(Milos Forman, Czechoslavakia, 1967) (F)

Such is Forman's subversive artistry that some critics continue to see in his subtle films only light-hearted folk comedies, paying loving attention to naturalistic detail and the somewhat ridiculous foibles of man. It was, however, quite proper for the Czech right-wing and the neo- Stalinists to attack him, for beneath his robust and sharp humor lurks a sardonic criticism of the petty bourgeois. Nowhere was this clearer than in this film, a hilarious and increasingly somber tale. In Chaplinesque manner, it kept the audience laughing while displaying narrow-minded provincialism, greed, petty theft, and an unsavory over-all impression (quite consciously inculcated) that the so-called new society, not having produced a new man, was not new at all. Yet Forman clearly lvoes his people and was undoubtedly much disturbed when Czechoslovakia's 45.000 firemen officially threatened to resign on the film's release. They withdrew this threat only when Forman added an explanatory title to the opening sequence: "This film is not against firemen, but against the regime." **SC**

THE FLY

(MUHA)

(Aleksander Marks and Vladimir Jutrisa, Yugoslavia, 1967)

An ominous, increasingly disturbing animation about a man and a continuously growing fly which first threatens him and then systematically destroys his very universe. Finally victorious, the monster accepts his dutifulk and resigned submission and then assumes human facial characteristics in a fraudulent ceasefire.

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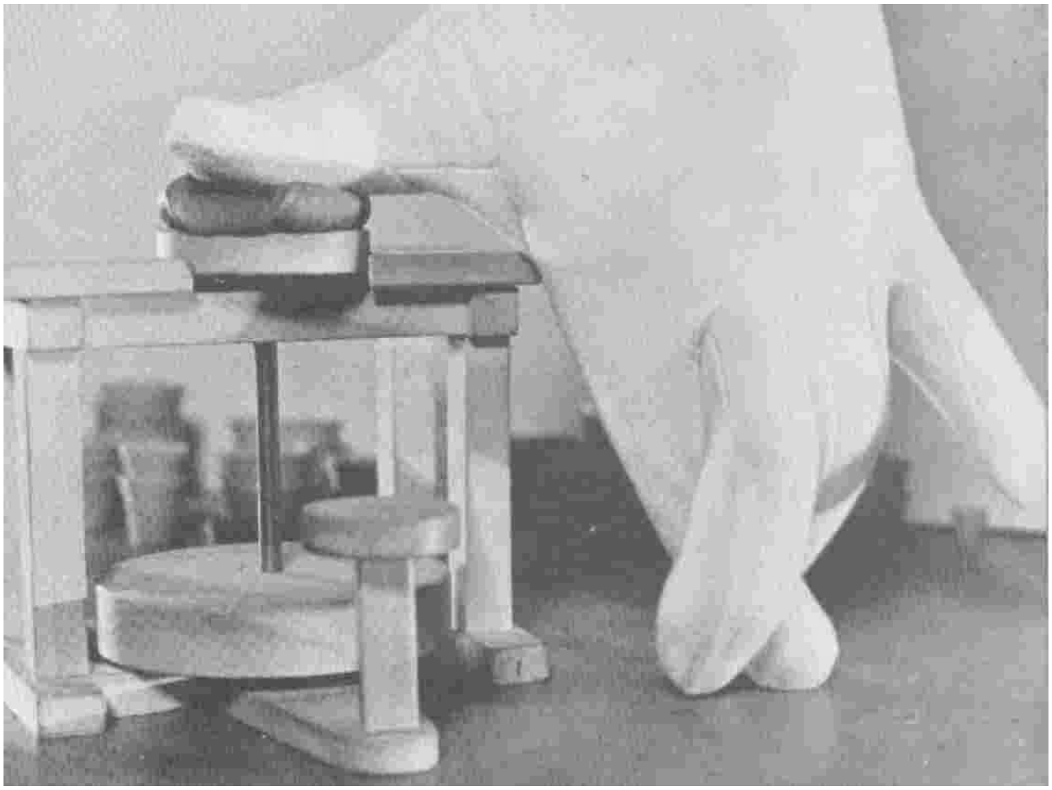

THE HAND

(Jiri Trnka, Czechoslavakia, 1966)

A disembodied, "live" hand invades the life of an artist-puppet, instructing him what to create, bringing him TV and newspapers (filled with "Hand" activities), finally compelling him to make sculptures of itself. After his death in frustration, the Hand gives him an ornate State funeral as a great artist of the people. A courageous early work of the Czech renaissance.

-

IDENTIFICATION MARKS: NONE

(Jerzy Skolimowski, Poland, 1964) (F)

The surprise this work caused upon its release in the West heralded the emergence of a major new talent, whose open narrative structures, rejection of simplistic realism, fluid compositions, and mystifying, always dynamic visual style related him strongly to the international modernist school. The film also confirmed again, unequivocally, the existence of

a new Eastern generation, free of the lifeless "official" ideology, but which however had to pay the price of disorientation and personal alienation. In this icy portrayal of Polish youth, we observe how its anti-hero (or hero?) spends his last (or first?) day of freedom before joining the army, from which he has escaped for years by pretending to study ichthyology. There is a girl and casual sex, a beloved dog who is destroyed, mysterious incidents that remain unexplained, aimless actions that serve as personal reaffirmations and a beating, until we realize that life itself is here viewed as an impenetrable, possibly meaningless mystery. The film also deals with anger against enemies only dimly perceived and against control from above. Accidentally enmeshed in an inane street interview, the youth is asked if he would like to be an astronaut. "Yes," says this presumed drifter, in what could stand as the epitaph of the film or of a generation: "I'd like to be launched on something definite -- and yet be able to control my own speed and direction ... "

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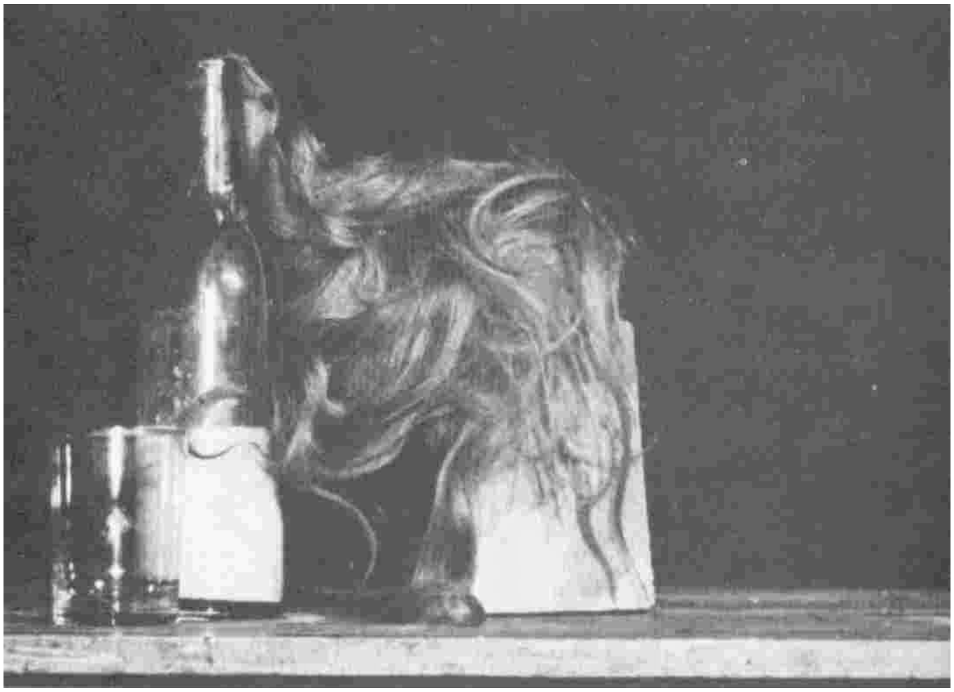

HOME
(DOM)

(Walerian Borowczyk and Jan Lenica, Poland, 1958)

A mysterious wig that slithers across a table, sips milk, and breaks a glass; a genuine surrealist image and, in 1958, the first intimation of a Polish film avant-garde entirely free of the sterilities of "socialist realism".

"Images and sequences express the thoughts and feelings of contemporary man, torn and confused by internal contradictions." Thus ran the oblique

(and cautious) program note supplied in 1958 by the courageous young Polish filmmakers who, with *Dom*, brought to the West the first intimation of a Polish avant-garde film movement opposed to prevailing sterilities of Polish socialist realism. Clearly in the surrealist and dadaist tradition, the "plot", utilizing cut-outs, live-action, and drawings, defied description. An animated wig slithers across a table, sips milk, breaks a glass, and devours an orange; shots of a man entering a room backwards and placing his hat on a rack and repeated compulsively, and an atmosphere of metaphysical anxiety is sustained throughout.

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THE INNOCENT SORCERERS

(Andrzej Wajda, Poland, 1960)

Jazz, sex, ennui, Western influences, a lack of values, and youthful anti-heroes in an important work of the Polish spring. Beneath the pseud0-intellectual posturing of its protagonist hide a very contemporary pathos and scepticism. The motorbike symbolizes ideology-free "modernity"; there is no communism in this shot.The second man on the bike is Roman Polanski.

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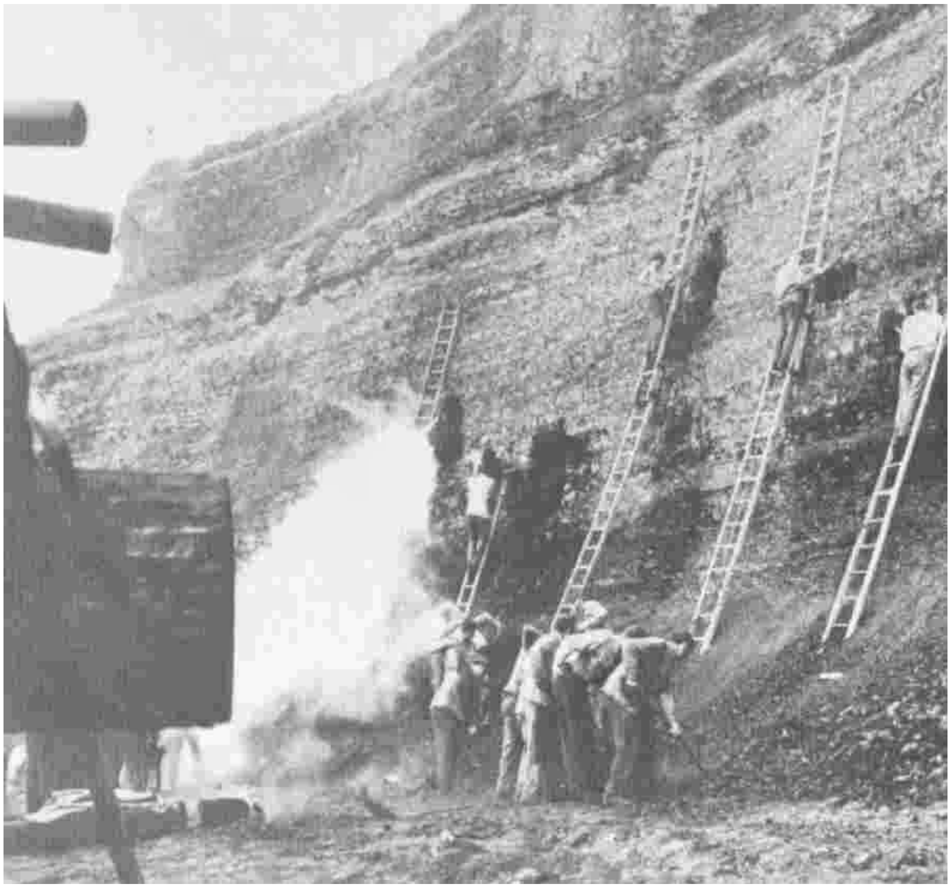
JAN PALACH

(Anonymous, Czechoslavakia, 1969)

The Czech student Jan Palach burned himself

in Prague's Wensceslav Square in January 1969 in protest against the Soviet occupation of his country. His funeral was attended by more than half a million mourners. Profoundly moving, it is a deep experience in silent grief and a testimony of mass opposition. The new Czech puppet government is vainly attempting to recall this film from abroad.



THE JOKE
(ZERT)

(Jaromil Jires, Czechoslavakia, 1968) (F)

The portrayal of Stalinist concentration camps (whose very existence had previously been denied) in a film from the East is a profoundly subversive act, for the unthinkable is now admitted to be true.

Possibly the most shattering indictment of totalitarianism to come out of a Communist country, this film was completed just after the Soviet tanks rolled into the streets of Prague in 1968. It is an astonishingly honest and disturbing film not only for its devastating attack on Stalinism, but also for its uncompromising view of the hypocrisy of poli-

tical turncoats and the opportunistic new middle classes. Chronicling one man's journey from youthful frivolity through political imprisonment to final awareness, it is a chilling examination of a corrupt society blighted by fear as much as by the cynicism that pays lip-service to "humanitarian" ideals.

-

LABYRINTH (LABIRYNTH)

(Jan Lenica, Poland, 1962)

One of the most important anti-totalitarian statements to come from the East. A tale of a future fascist society, in which monstrous bird-reptiles and efficient bureaucrats brainwash the population by drilling ideology directly into their skulls. A stranger arrives, is caught, tortured, and killed while attempting to escape; there is no happy ending.

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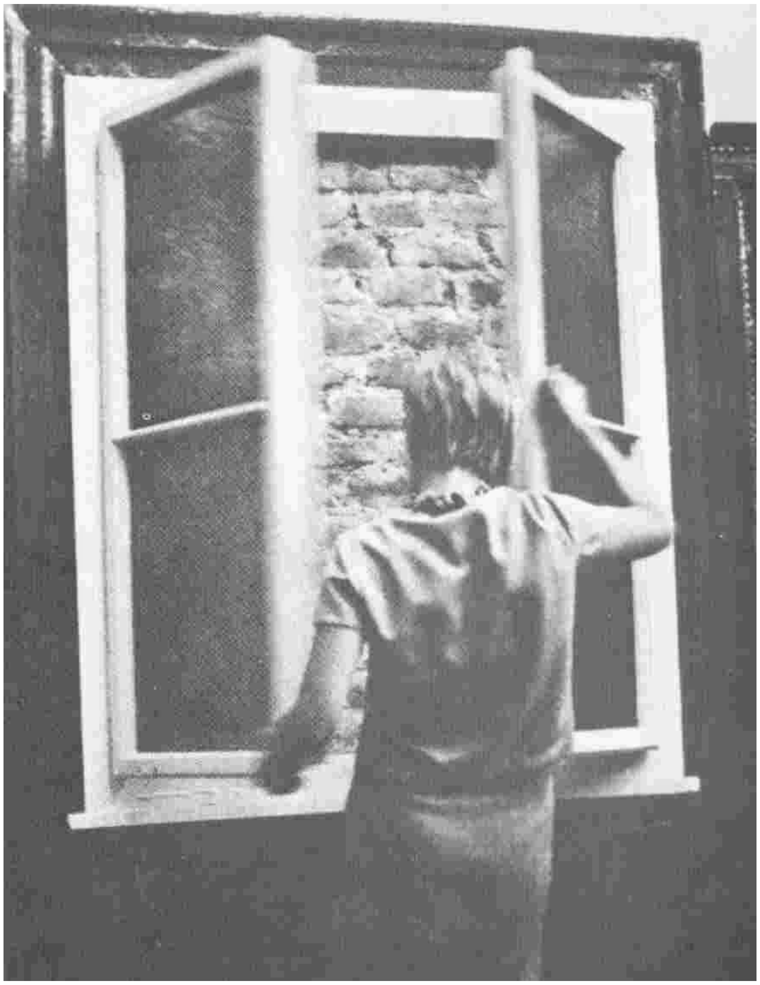

JOSEPH KILIAN

(Pavel Juracek and Jan Schmidt, Czechoslavakia, 1963)

Under socialism, you are not supposed to face a brick wall when you open a window. Forerunner of the Czech thaw, this astonishing, Kafkaesque allegory of Stalinism was the first intimation of things to come. Mordant, sophisticated, and secret, it was insidiously anti-Establishment in its comments on bureaucracy, alienation, and the possible incomprehensibility of all human endeavor.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

THE EAST - PART TWO

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

ORDINARY COURAGE

(Evald Schorm, Czechoslavakia, 1964) (F)

Possibly the most influential and accomplished work of the Czech renaissance, this story of a disillusioned young Communist increasingly at odds with his environment touched on themes of alienation, opportunism, the exhaustion of ideology, and charted the progress of a secular crucifixion.

Unquestionably one of the most important antecedents of the Czech renaissance, long under censorship ban, this searing, passionate film is the first fully realized work from the East to deal with alienation and the conflict between revolutionaries and careerists in a "socialist" society. It was this film that established Schorm as the intellectual leader of a young Czech film renaissance. Stylistically influenced by Antonioni, it tells the tragic story of a young Communist activist, who, attempting to remain faithful to revolutionary ideals as he sees them, finds himself in increasing conflict with his environment. His speeches turn into cliches, his political activities become meaningless, his love affairs grow stale; all around are opportunists or hard-drinking worker-bourgeois. Audacious ideological implications, unmistakeable visual symbols, and incisive comments on post-revolutionary reality stamp this bitter and ironic film as a political work of great importance. The denouement is tragic and extremely moving.

"In films we are always being offered the apparently truthful, outer face of reality. This naturalism, dependent on an often deceptive common sense, is misleading; it takes us to a realism of probably imitation, to elusiveness, ceaseless explanations, clarifications and substantiations, so that nobody will have any doubts. The strength of the raw fact, of the fantastic vision disappears." - Evald Schorm

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SUBVERSION IN EASTERN EUROPE: AESOPIAN METAPHORS

- PART TWO -

FILMS

WARSAW 1956

(Jerzy Bossak and Waclaw Kazimierczak, Poland, 1956)

Where certain images are forbidden, even the most ordinary shot may assume extraordinary importance. This is a scene from the unprecendented Polish "Black Series" of the late 50s -- documentaries critical of living conditions and social problems in Poland. Neither in Russia, its satellites, nor China has the cinema verite quality of these films ever been even approached.

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THE MACHINE (MASZYNA)

(Daniel Szchechura, Poland, 1963)

In this animation, a huge intricate machine is painstakingly constructed out of many parts in an atmosphere of relevant adoration. Finally, the bureaucrat cuts the ribbon, the scaffolding is removed and the giant, filling the entire screen are, begins to -- sharpen pencils.

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MERRY WORKING CLASS (VESELA KLASA)

(Bojana Marija, Yugoslavia, 196?)

A clandestine political argument, presented in the form of satirical songs and vulgar couplets about nutrition and sex, foreign policy, and the belief

in the future. Instead of complaints, there are lyrics, music, and wine. The director is Makavejev's wife.

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MY DEAREST WISH

(Jan Spata, Czechoslavakia, 1965)

Another unique document from the Czech liberalization period: obviously unrehearsed interviews with over 100 young Czechs from all walks of life who are asked about their greatest wish. The fascinated answers (and the unguarded, innocent faces accompanying them) reveal the absence of official "socialist" ideology and the persistence of bourgeois or human values: consumer goods, marriage, love, personal freedom, the right to travel abroad, the end of parental or political tutelage. The film's honesty and frankness remain unprecedented in the Eastern bloc.

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NOT ALL THAT FLIES IS A BIRD (NIJE PTICA SVE STO LETI)

(Borislav Sajtinac, Yugoslavia, 1970)

A huge bird systematically terrorizes the world until it destroys mankind and itself. The result is a new evil force which continues as before, spreading terror and violence. In a particularly horrifying scene, it bores into a woman's vagina and devours her from within. This uncompromising, unrelenting work has already become a contemporary animation classic.

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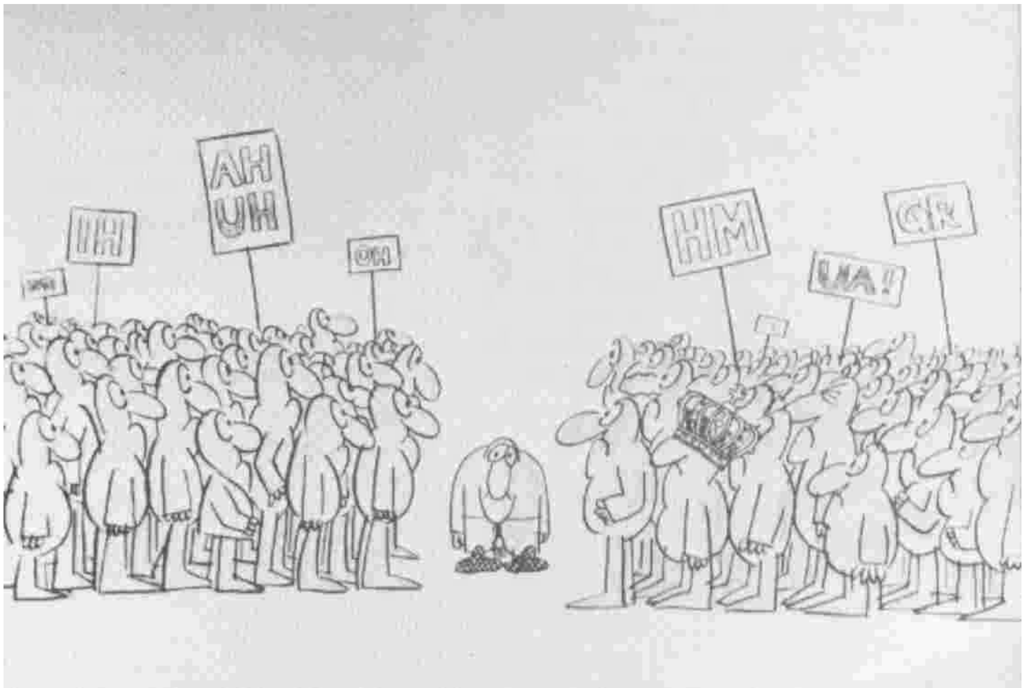

PASSING DAYS

(Nedeljko Dragic, Yugoslavia, 1969)

In the course of ten minutes, one man's home and private life is invaded and ultimately destroyed by waves of secret police, rampaging soldiers, political opportunists, persuasive con-men, and opposing, equally nonsensical mass movements fighting for his loyalty. A black, symptomatic farce.

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PER ASPERA AD ASTRA

(Nedeljko Dragic, Yugoslavia, 1969)

A one-minute subversion: a man struggles vainly to get out of a toilet bowl, in which he is stuck as far as his neck. Finally, he is offered an anonymous, helping hand. Grabbing it, this serves to activate the mechanism and he is flushed down.

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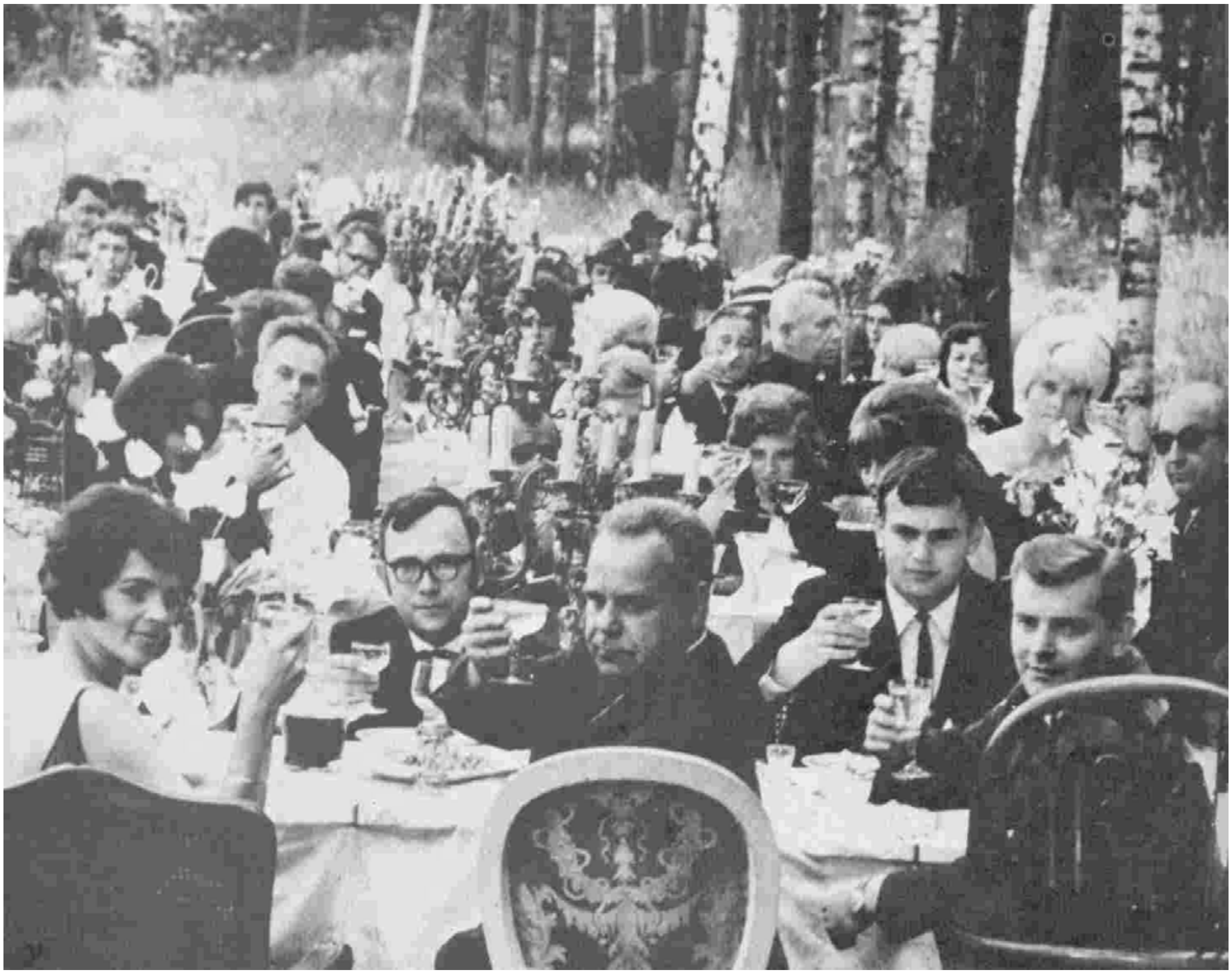


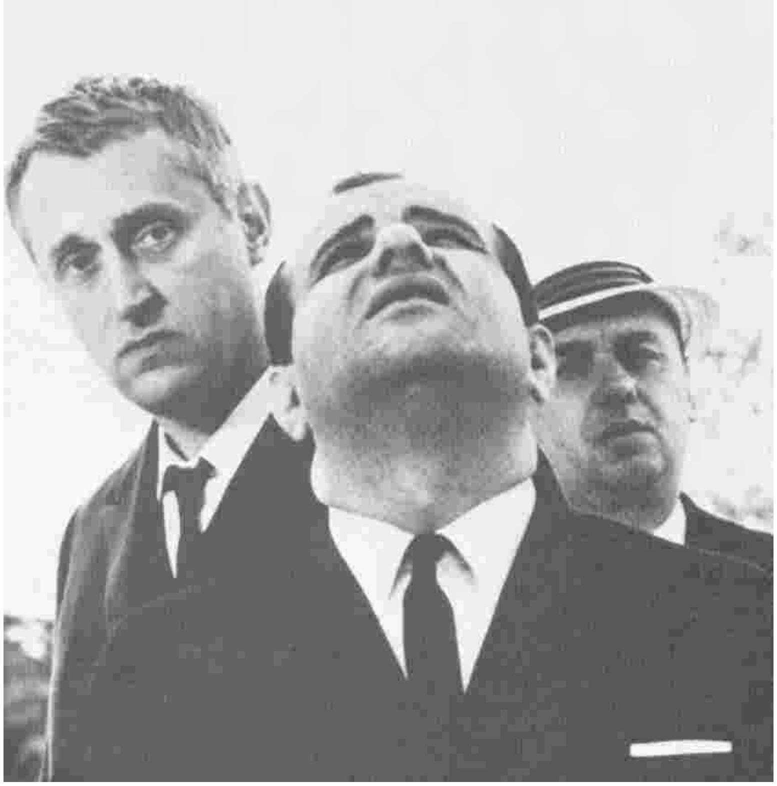
REPORT ON THE PARTY AND THE GUESTS
(O SLAVNOSTI A HOSTECH)

(Jan Nemec, Czechoslavakia, 1966) (F)

Testifying to the relativity of images, the latent meaning of this shot has undergone several changes; originally part of an audacious political parable produced under Stalinism (and banned), it became a still in a film hailed under Dubcek, and now is once again forbidden. Its final poignancy resides in its case: Nemec gathered leading artists and intellectuals to "perform" in this scene; they look at us, by now no longer in triumph but in stubborn determination and perhaps in accusation.

The most famous and certainly one of the most important masterpieces of the Czech film renaissance, this daring work was promptly banned on completion in 1966, defiantly awarded the Czech Critics' Prize in 1967 while under ban, and released only under Dubcek. As we watch its deceptive progress, Renoir turns into Bunuel and we discover a scathing, pessimistic statement about human conduct under totalitarianism, chilling, timeless, uncomfortably familiar. The assorted opportunists, camp-followers, hypocrites, willing victims, and vapid fpetty-bourgeois

are courageously (now tragically) played by leading Czech artists, writers, filmmakers, and intellectuals, all involved in the short-lived Czech reform movement.



REPORT ON THE PARTY AND THE GUESTS (O SLAVNOSTI A HOSTECH)

(Jan Nemec, Czechoslavakia, 1966) (F)

An historic shot from the same film shows, on the left, the only man unwilling to collaborate with totalitarianism who is therefore hunted down at the film's end. This "non-conformist" is played by film director Evald Schorm (*Ordinary Courage*), one of the intellectual leaders of the Czech film renaissance. One needs to look at his face carefully.

Guests have gathered for an outdoor party convoked by a mysterious host. Their merrymaking is rudely disturbed by the arrival of Rudolph, a stranger, and his cohorts who herd the group into a circle in a clearing for an interrogation regarding an unspecified transgression and subject them to insults, humiliations, and brute force. All comply, except one who finds that his revolt earns him the enmity of his friends who now unthinkingly collaborate, blindly following Rudolph's orders so as not to be excluded from the party. The one-man revolt is overcome by force, just as the genial host appears, smilingly apologizes for Rudolph's rude behavior, and explains that it has all been a joke. Whereupon the guests sit down at beautifully appointed

tables to continue the festivities, forgetting what has happened. But one of the group refuses to play the game, he cannot forget. He leaves in protest, his act of free will evoking great uneasiness among rulers, active collaborators, and passive conformists alike. It is Rudolph who proposes that ("to re-establish the necessary equilibrium") it is essential to hunt the defector down with dogs and guns and return him to the fold at all costs. The hunt begins; the candles are snuffed out; and dog barks echo on the black screen as the film ends.

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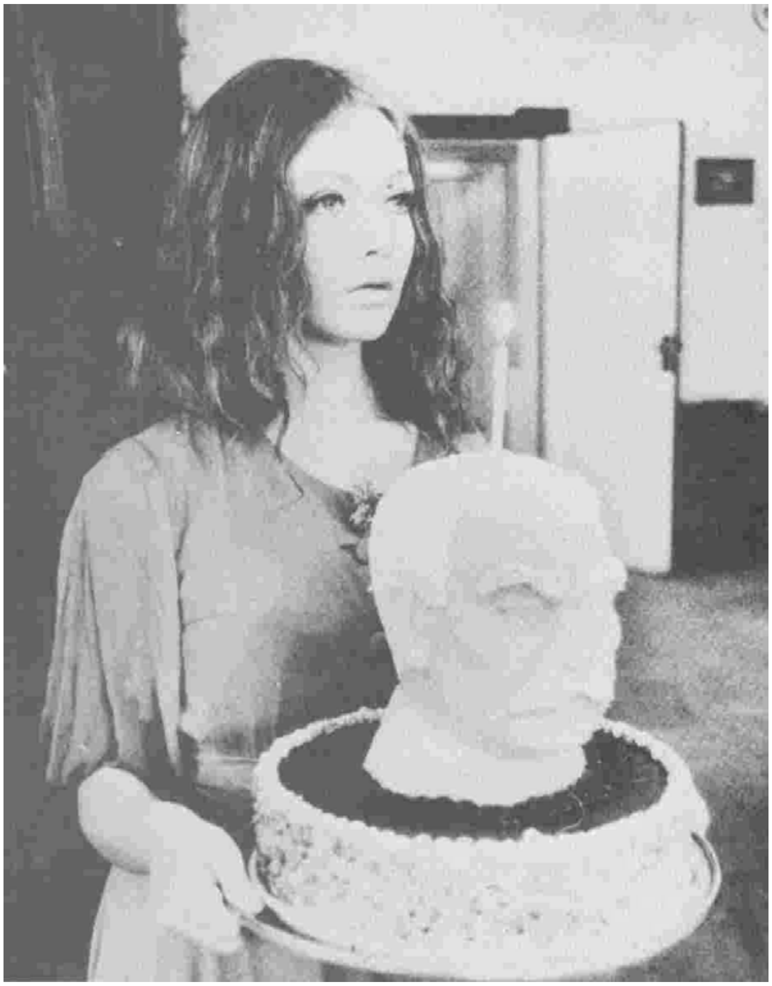

THE ROLE OF MY FAMILY IN THE WORLD REVOLUTION

(Bata Cengic, Yugoslavia, 1971)

In its given historical context, one of the most subversive stills in this book. Only in Yugoslavia -- and only for a limited period -- could it have been possible to show (and then to eat) a Stalin-cake with a candle growing out of his head. From a bizarre political film farce that expressed the ideological disillusionment of a new generation.

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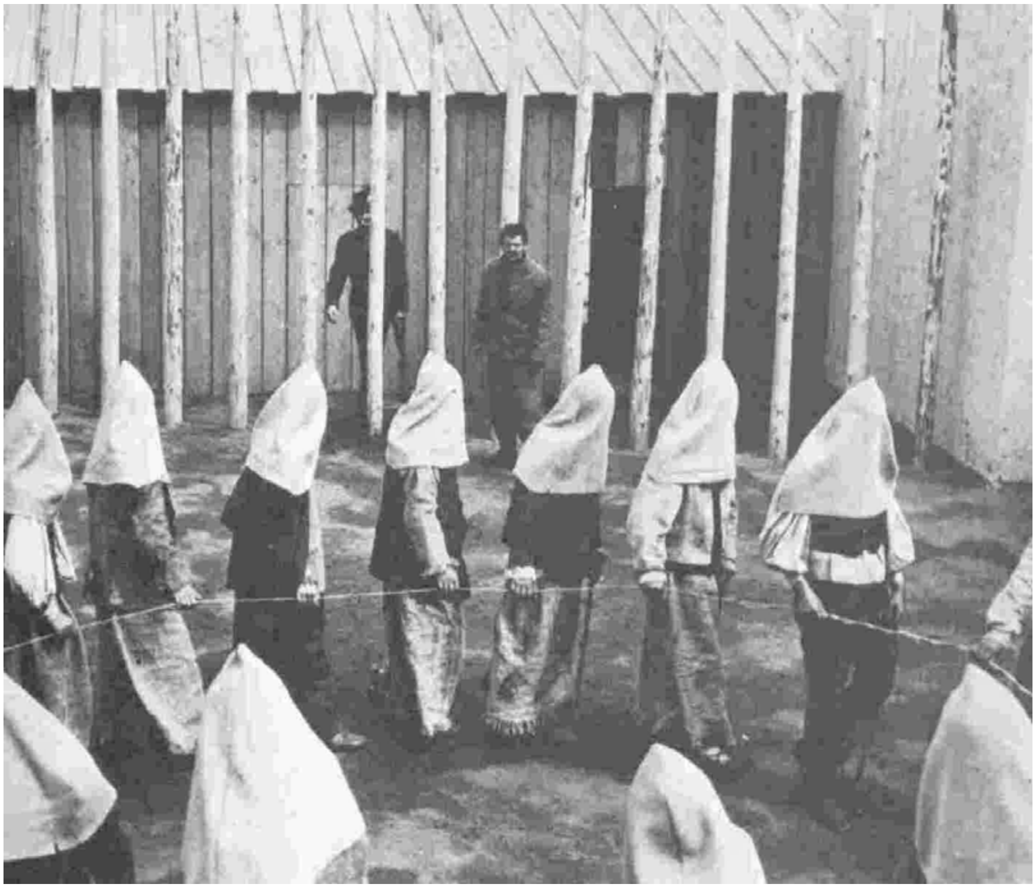

THE ROUND-UP
(aka THE HOPELESS ONES)
(SZEGENYLEGENYEK)

(Miklos Jancso, Hungary, 1965) (F)

Imprisonment, shown visually in mysterious, hooded figures, moving across the frame in an ellipse against the vertical, forbidding bars in the back. A poisonous, anti-romantic lyricism -- reflective of 20th century realities -- permeates the unique visual style of this great artist.

The Hungarian Miklos Jancso is unquestionably one of the most original film talents to emerge in the last decade as a focal point of the East European film renaissance, where it intersects with growing tendencies in Western contemporary cinema. Jancso's thematic preoccupations and visual style are personal and unique. A poisonous lyricism -- anti-romantic and reflective of the truths of the 20th century -- permeates his inexplicable charades of inexorable cruelty, submission, betrayal, and repression, in which victims and oppressors constantly change places and no one remains uncorrupted by the exercise of violence.

Beginning with *Round-Up*, his best, Jancso's

stylized tragic-epic works have all concerned themselves with the problems of power and oppression, in images of searing plastic beauty and in sequences of implacable violence and terror set against ominous, brilliant landscapes of the most cruel black and white. These are visual metaphors of truths better expressed obliquely, the anguished statements of a pessimistic humanist, haunted by the problem of totalitarianism, war, and the corruption of power.

Jancso's concern with these topics is obsessive and passionate; he returns to them again and again. *Round-Up* deals with the diabolic entrapment and destruction by psychological and physical torture of a group of 1848 Hungarian nationalists in revolt against the Austro-Hungarian empire *The Red and The White* with the endless mutual cruelties and massacres of the 1919 Russian civil war: *Silence and Cry* with the hunting down of adherents of Bela Kun's abortive Soviet regime in Hungary; and *Winter Wind*, with the story of a member of the ustachis, a Croatian anarchist group of the early 1930s, who is destroyed by the corruption of his group and then is ironically turned into a hero.

Jancso's style -- always terns, stylized, and stripped to essentials -- has grown more vigorous with every work, until he now uses less than 15 camera set-ups in each film, filled with constant choreographic movement. The deceptive simplicity of his work quickly reveals an almost architectonic precision of structure and ideological metaphor;his "improvisations" are those of an obsessive genius.

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STUDENT STRIKES
(LIPANJSKA GIBANJA)

(Zelimir Zilnik, Yugoslavia, 1968)

This documentary of the widespread 1968 Belgrade student demonstrations has never been shown in Yugoslavia. Hospitalized students describe militia beatings, thousands sing revolutionary songs, and at a Karl Marx University (!) mass meeting a radical speech is delivered, consisting entirely (and without attribution) of a Robespierre anti-ruling class address -- as applicable now as it was then.

THE TECHNIQUE AND THE RITE (LA TECNICA E IL RITO)

(Miklos Jancso, Italy, 1971) (F)

Even working abroad (in this film for Italian television), the Hungarian Jancso pursued his basic themes. Performed in choreographic, stylized episodes of alternating violence and repose, the film investigates, in parable form, the gradual rise to power of a young idealistic Attila and the inevitable degeneration of his one-man rule amidst miasmas of mistrust and imaginary plots: this is Jancso's uncompromising and courageous comment on power and totalitarianism.At the end, Attila, now in absolute control, proclaims himself "hammer of the world" and weeps.

TWO MEN AND A WARDROBE (DWAJ LUDZIE Z STAFA)

(Roman Polanski, Poland, 1957)

Two men emerge from the ocean with a mysterious wardrobe -- and are promptly rejected by "socialist" society no longer in need of (possibly dangerous) miracles, preferring corruption, indifference, and crime. A pioneering work of the Polish "thaw" of the late fifties by the then unknown Polanski.

The limited Polish reform movement that brought Gomulka to power in the late 50s also expressed itself in the cinema. At the 1958 International Avant-Garde Film Festival in Brussels, there surfaced, to everyone's astonishment, seven 35mm films -- produced and financed by the Polish State Film Industry! -- ranging from surrealism to dadaism, from abstract to expressionist art. Two of the films -- *Two Men and a Wardrobe* and *Dom*, received the top awards at the festival. Viewed in 1958 as heady harbingers of the possible end of sterile, "socialist realism", they now stand as melancholy reminders of a short-lived period of reform; significantly, their directors, Borowczyk, Lenica, and Polanski now live and work in the West.

Two Men and a Wardrobe succeeds, by means of poetic imagery and conception, in blending what superficially seems light fantasy with social comment of the utmost severity. Two men emerge from the sea, proto-mythological fashion, however not with a fabled treasure but a dilapidated wardrobe. Outsiders, they attempt to make contact with organized society, to interest it in the symbolic value of the wardrobe, but to no avail; even their efforts at helping others fail, nor can they sit with it in coffee houses, ride on buses, or get involved with girls. As they pursue their task, pickpockets, murderers, and drunks crowd the edges of the frame. It seems that society has no room for ambiguous (and possibly dangerous) treasures, preferring to follow its own set and corrupt ways. In a provocative ending, the appropriate conclusion is drawn by the two protagonists, the only people shown to be human: they return to the sea and disappear.

In retrospect, this and Polanski's other short films (*An Angel Has Fallen, The Fat and The Lean, Mammals*), all made before he turned to features, emerge as his most personal, most subversive works. **SC**

UNTITLED
(BEZ NASLOVA)

(Borivoj Dovnikovic, Yugoslavia, 1965)

This three-minute film consists of nothing but credits -- director, producer, department heads, lawyers, consultants, accountants, administrators, executive administrators, assistant administrators -- and the end title. A perfect satire on bureaucracy.

WALKOVER

(Jerzy Skolimowski, Poland, 1965)

Burdened neither by war experiences not the post-war heroic period, the protagonist -- played by the filmmaker (hands in pockets) -- represents the new young of the East, unable to "connect" with official ideology. The dynamic, mysterious composition of the still reflects Skolimowski's superb pictorial sense.

THE WALL
(ZID)

(Ante Zaninovic, Yugoslavia, 1966)

Two men are stopped by a wall at which one immediately gives up; the other, despite endless failures, attack it in various ways. Finally, in despair, but without admitting defeat, he smashes a hole in it with his head, paying for victory with his life. The other has only to bend down a little to pass through the hole. However, there is another wall beyond, and another man whom he can watch clearing his path for him.

WANDERING
(BLOUDENI)

(Jan Curik and Antonin Masa, Czechoslavakia, 1965) (F)

This densely idelogical, ambitious film is told in a sparse, seemingly realistic, yet ultimately mystifying style. A cryptic study in futility, the clash of generations, and the irrelevance of the past, it is a deceptive political allegory; contemporary and suffused with images and situations of magic realism. The story deals with a crisis in the lives of three people, which reflects the moral abyss between Stalinist and post-Stalinist generations. The father lives in the past, recalling his few achievements and many compromises. The son, unable to endure his hypocrisy and irrelevance, leaves home. To discover life for himself, he embarks on an ambiguous journey which ends in disillusionment and deeper awareness. With his already unstable life destroyed by his son's departure, the father follows him, but instead of finding his son, discovers himself. The thematic and formal subtlety of this work is astonishing, its meaningful ambiguity reminiscent of early Antonioni. Masa also wrote the even better screenplay for Ordinary Courage.

"Values are relative, certainties uncertain. We move on thin ice. But is not the only way out, the only guarantee for human -- and artistic -- values, precisely to be found in the search itself?" - Antonin Masa

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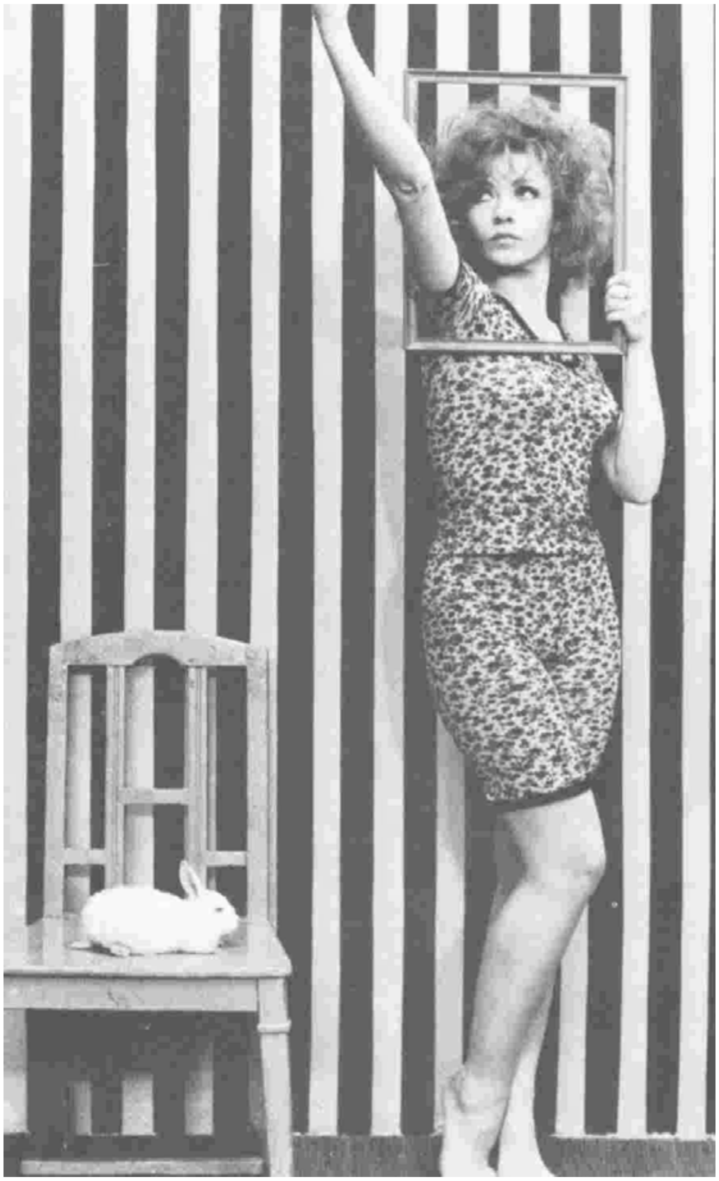
WR - MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM (WR - MISTERIJE ORGANIZMA)

(Dusan Makavejev, Yugoslavia, 1971) (F)

Hilarious, highly erotic political comedy from Yugoslavia advances sex as an ideological imperative for liberation; an outrageous, exuberant work of a new breed of international revolutionists, spawned by anarchist-communist ideas, anti-Stalinism, Consciousness III in America, and Wilhelm Reich's sexual and political radicalism. The total portrayal of sex is a "first" for the East. SC

Banned in Yugoslavia, hailed at international film festivals, this is unquestionably one of the most important subversive masterpieces of the 1970s: a hilarious, highly erotic political comedy which quite seriously proposes sex as the ideological imperative for revolution and advances a plea for Erotic Socialism. Only the revolutionary Cubist Makavejev -- clearly one of the most significant new directors now working in world cinema -- could have pulled together this hallucinatory *melange* of Wilhelm Reich, excerpts from a monstrous Soviet film, *The Vow* (1946), starring Stalin; a transvestite of the Warhol factory; A.S. Neill of Summerhill; several beautiful young Yugoslavs fucking merrily throughout;the editor of America's sex magazine Screw having his most important private part lovingly plaster-cast in erection; not to speak of a Soviet figure-skating champion, Honored Artist of the People (named Vladimir Ilyich!), who cuts off his girlfriend's head with one of his skates after a particularly bountiful ejaculation, to save his Communist virginity from Revisionist Yugoslav Contamination. It is an outrageous, exuberant, marvelous work of a new breed of international revolutionary, strangely spawned by cross-fertilization between the original radical ideologies of the East, Consciousness III in America, and the sexual-politics radicalism of the early Wilhelm Reich, who equated sexual with political liberation and denied the possibility of one without the other. In one of the climactic scenes of the film, the ravishing young Yugoslav girl star pronounces herself in favor of masturbation and all sexual positions, and admonishes the assembled Yugoslav workers and peasants "to fuck merrily and without fear! Let the sweet current run up your spin, sway your hips! Even the smallest child will tell you that the sweetest place is between the legs! Children and youth must be given the right of genital happiness! Intertwined lovers radiate a bluish light, the same light as was seen by the astronauts in outer space! FREE LOVE WAS WHERE THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION FAILED!" SC



WR - MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM (WR - MISTERIJE ORGANIZMA)

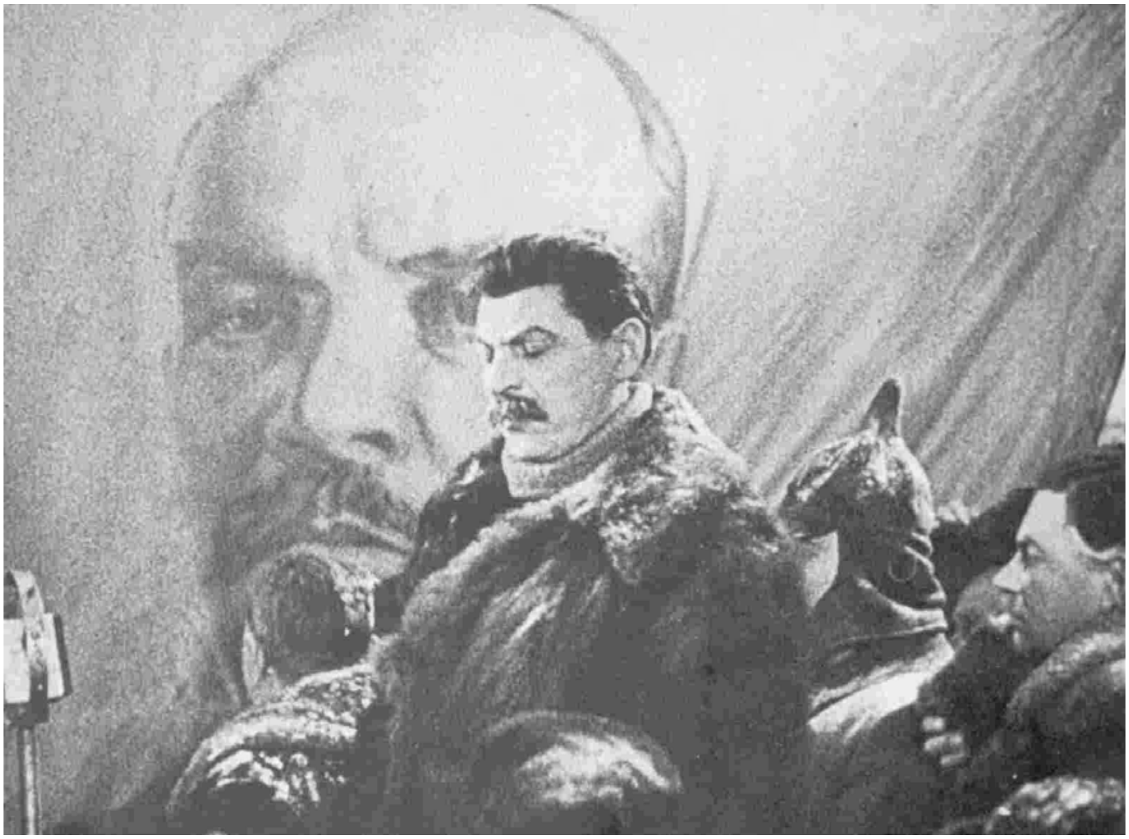
(Dusan Makavejev, Yugoslavia, 1971) (F)

The ravishing sex reformer and radical in a provocative pose; composing sex and politics, it also reveals Makavejev's "aestheticism"; the unexpected rabbit, the strong, two-colored vertical stripes and particularly the inexplicable empty frame. SC

Beneath the film's lighthearted frivolity and marvelous humor lurks a more serious ideological intent: opposition to all opressive social systems, East or West, the removal of prurience from sex and a final squaring of accounts by the new radicals with the now reactionary Russian regime. In a poignant sequence that will live in film history, the girl, Milena Dravic (in love with the Russian skater, and rejected by him because of his fear of sex and ascetic

devotion to a lifeless myth of revolution), starts beating him blindly, repeatedly, while delivering some of the saddest, most disillusioned indictments yet offered against Stalinism in any film, and denounces his revolution as "a puny lie disguised as a great historic truth". Thus Makavejev is quite accurate in describing his film as "a black comedy, a political circus, a fantasy on the fascism and communism of human bodies, the political life of human genitals, a proclamation of the pornographic essence of any system of authority and power over others."

The film is also a tribute to the ultimate power of ideas over institutions; the production of such a work in Yugoslavia contributes to the regime's evolution. Its eventual showing there -- impossible at the time of writing -- would testify to the regime's self-confidence and its realization of the film's unquestionably revolutionary stand. **SC**



WR - MYSTERIES OF THE ORGANISM (WR - MISTERIJE ORGANIZMA)

(Dusan Makavejev, Yugoslavia, 1971) (F)

An ominous, heinous still, taken from the famous Stalinist film, The Vow, and incorporated by Makavejev in his strongly anti-Stalinist work. In the film Stalin is seen first, speaking; then, a banner with Lenin's face is slowly unfurled in the background until it fills the screen, hovering over Stalin in (to Makavejev)

not necessarily a benign manner. SC

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

DEATH OF A BUREAUCRAT
(Tomas G. Alea, Cuba, 1966)
A dream of coffins and nuns in a satirical Cuban attack on bureaucracy. To qualify for rent-exemption (made possible by her husband's death), the widow must present his working papers; but these were buried with him as a status symbol -- and "only the man himself" can request a duplicate. To get the original, he must be exhumed -- but this is illegal for two years. Dug up surreptitiously, his reburial becomes impossible because no legal proof of exhumation exists.

LEFT AND REVOLUTIONARY CINEMA: THIRD WORLD

FILMS

A REPORT ON TORTURE

(Saul Landau and Haskell Wexler, Brazil, 1971)

The bold counterposing of an upside-down, gagged female with a probably threatening hand and a man's lower torso symbolizes the ambiance of this document of our times; a factual study, through interviews and demonstrations, of the Brazilian government's use of torture against political prisoners. The protagonists are recent Brazilian political refugees in Chile (now presumably again in jail or tortured anew).

THE ALIENIST
(IL ALIENISTA)

(Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, Brazil, 1970) (F)

Based on Machado de Assis' novel, this is a macabre story of a 19th century Brazilian priest and social reformer who puts most of the population of his village into a madhouse to "cure" them of insanity and sin, and make his utopia come true. The land-owners (left without workers to till the land) volunteer to take their places in the "rest home"; when the priest refuses, he is subjugated and finally becomes the only inmate of the asylum. "Some day", he muses, anticipating Laing, "the madness of our day will be the reason of tomorrow." The film's radical intention is clear and the decor, color, and mise en scene extravagantly beautiful, but the audacious parable ultimately becomes labored.

ANTONIO-DAS-MORTES

(Glauber Rocha, Brazil, 1969) (F)

The archetypical themes of revolutionary Brazilian cinema; the arid plains, primitive stage for atavistic plots of oppression, terror, revenge; the towering revolutionary hero fighting for the downtrodden; the ever-present rifle. Bloody, exorbitant, and partisan, this is an ecstatic song of revolutionary violence. SC

Among the young Brazilian directors of the *"Cinema Novo"* movement, it is particularly Glauber Rocha who has transcended its early neo-realism to embrace expressionism and stylization. In *Antonio-Das-Mortes*, these characteristics assume the flamboyant sweep of a revolutionary folk epic, replete with a mysticism both surprising and appropriate of the late 20th century, when rationalism has revealed its limitations and deeper layers of consciousness are being probed in ecstasy by the new revolutionaries of our day.

Antoni0-Das-Mortes is an exuberant, and blood-stained radical work, choreographed and wedded by proud young nationalists to Brazil's rich folk heritage, which includes the legends of the cangaceiros", fiery bandit-rebels who redressed social injustice by violence. This is the story of Antonio-Das-Mortes, a former *cangaceiro* who during the 40s turned professional killer in the pay of rich landowners and the church, to kill his former compatriots; "touched by grace" -- his realization of his employers' cruelty and injustice -- he finally rejoins the revolutionary cause with a vengeance.

An implacable, metaphysical tone and rhythm permeate this film, creating a non-realistic continuity that depends on expressionist tableaux, set to indigenous music from African and Portuguese sources. Mass dances and ballads provide a structure for the stylized action. The result is one of the most difficult and original works of the *"Cinema Novo"*.

"To make film is to make a contribution to our revolution, to stoke its fire, to make people conscious. This is the tragic origin of our cinema. Our aesthetics is the aesthetics of cruelty; it is revolutionary." - Glauber Rocha SC

APROPOS OF A PERSON VARIOUSLY CALLED HOLY LAZARUS OR BABALU (ACERCA DE UN PERSONAJE QUE UNOS LLAMAN SAN LAZARO Y OTROS LLAMAN BABALU)

(Octavio Cortazar, Cuba, 1968)

To show the viability of superstitious belief, this documentary records a still-continuing religious holiday in Cuba, at which Holy Lazarus is simultaneously celebrated as "Babalu" because of the strange mingling of Catholic and African religion in primitive societies. As the believers crawl painfully towards his shrine, shots of a new generation doing calisthenics are intercut.

BLOOD OF THE CONDOR (YAWAR MALLKU)

(Jorge Sanjines, Bolivia, 1970) (F)

This anti-government and anti-American Bolivian feature pivots on a persistent and unsavory charge never sufficiently disproven, that in a misguided attempt to combat poverty and overpopulation, the American Peace Corps engages in programs of sterilization of native women in underdeveloped countries. The indigenous ruling class is seen as accomplice; and the film ends on a note of revolutionary anticipation.

MEMORIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT

(Tomas G. Alea, Cuba, 1969) (F)

His family having emigrated to America because of Castro, this ambivalent liberal, left behind in his opulent apartment, pulls his wife's stockings over his head in anguish. His doubts and lack of involvement increase. Finally, as others prepare for action against America during the missile crisis, he watches them detachedly through binoculars. Politically, the most mature and "open" of the Cuban films.

CHILD UNDERNOURISHMENT (DESNUTRICION INFANTIL)

(Alvaro Ramirez, Chile, 1969)

A record of one of the many secret outrages existing everywhere in such abundance that they remain unsolved, unresolved, and of no interest -- in this case the plight of poor Chilean children: living skeletons, grotesque monsters, in hovels, covered by fleas. This is why Allende was necessary; and why a new, now violent, social restructuring remains inevitable in the Chiles of the world.

CULEBRA: THE BEGINNING

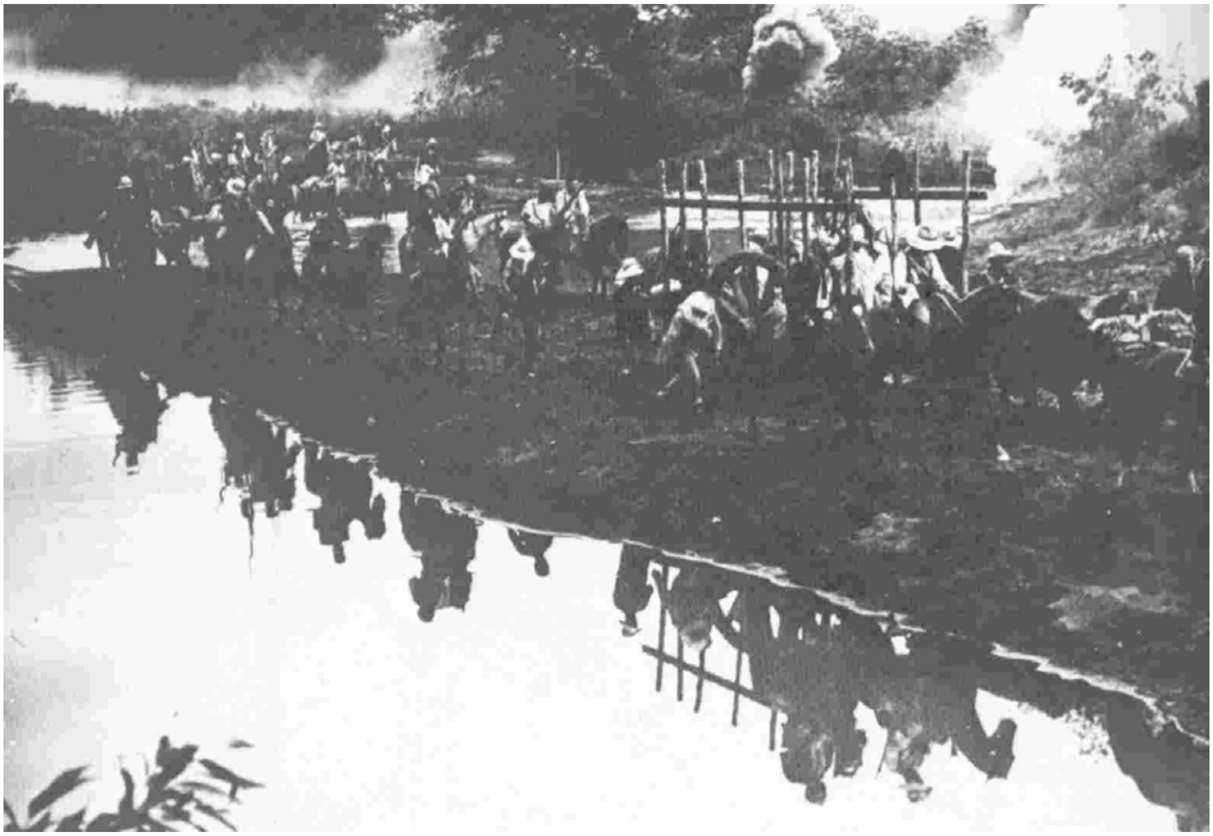
(Diego de la Texera, Puerto Rico, 1971)

Culebra, an island off Puerto Rico, is used by the USA as a target area for bombing practice with live ammunition. The film documents two years of demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, and, ultimately, a live-in at the bombing area by the people of Culebra, attempting to put a stop to the pollution and destruction of the island.

EMITAI

(Ousmane Sembene, Senegal, 1971) (F)

An anti-imperialist yet curiously muted evocation of the French colonial period and of the strong yet waning influence of tribal religions. As usual with Sembene, there is much fascinating ethnological detail; more importantly, this is a film by an African for Africans, designed to make them share discovery and revelation, the limitations of myth, the cruelty of the opressor, the fortitude of the people, and the need for revolution.



THE FIRST CHARGE OF THE MACHETE (LA PRIMERA CARGA AL MACHETE)

(Manuel Octavio Gomez, Cuba, 1969)

The mysterious beauty and strange duality of this still -- to turn it upside down merely creates another, equally valid reality -- symbolizes the strongly aesthetic preoccupations of this irector and testifies to the divergent stylistic tendencies permitted within the Cuban cinema.

Possibly the most "aesthetic" and "experimental" of revolutionary Cuba's films, this outstanding work utilizes high contrast photography, over-exposure, and solarization to created the faded chiaroscuro and poetic authenticity of the period it depicts. The film deals with an 1870 uprising against the Spanish occupation troops in Cuba, in which the *machete*, originally used to cut sugar cane, becomes a weapon of the people's welfare. The portrayals of decadent upper classes and heroic peasants are sharp and incisive, and distancing devices -- such as characters addressing the camera -- are used to induce attitudes of analysis instead of involvement. The emergence of such a strongly poetic work within the Cuban film industry testifies to the divergent aesthetic tendencies permitted expression within the revolution.

THE GODS AND THE DEAD
(OS DEUSES E OS MORTOS)
(Ruy Guerra, Brazil, 1970)

The man grievously wronged by the machinations of the powerful returns to exact brutal revenge from each. A compelling sadness and choreographic intensity envelops this moment. Though the man's gesture is almost saint-like, one fears incipient

violence; no good can come from this encounter.

The pent-up revolutionary passion, the violent fervor and the coming explosion of the continent are evident in this major work. Told as a revolutionary epic, it has the hallmarks of the great Brazilian radical myths, strong, violent colors, bizarre tableaux, extreme stylization, and a total preoccupation with death, blood and revolution. Luxurious ornate interiors and sweeping outdoor scenes with hundreds of extras embroider a powerful, dense visual style, but the cubistically told story is ultimately too diffuse. Guerra has given his "gods" anthropomorphic shape, "to make their obsessions, prostration and despair more visible", utilizing elements of magic derived from African cults. A mixture of baroque realism and stately expressionism reaches unexpected levels of desperation, ultimately leaving us with acute yet impotent pain frightening to experience; American owners of Brazilian tin mines (and American liberals) should see this kind of work.

THE HEIRS
(OS HERDEIROS)

(Carlos Diegues, Brazil, 1968/9) (F)

An expressionist, at time semi-surrealist account of a Brazilian family over the last 40 years, in the historical impasse which the non-revolutionary classes could not overcome. A succession of political plots, melodramatic upheavals, and betrayals capture the violence, color, and atavistic strangeness of an opressed, stagnant civilization and its victims.

LBJ

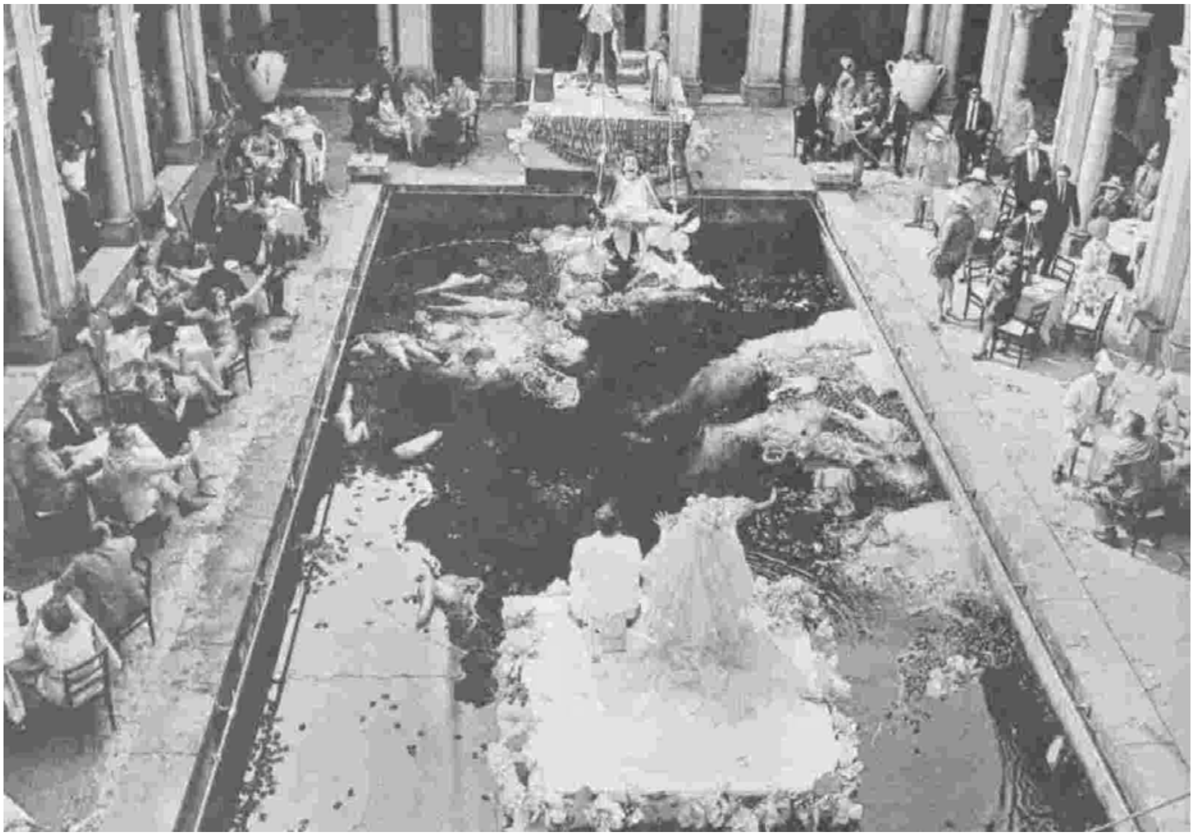
(Santiago Alvarez, Cuba, 1968)

Using LBJ's career as matrix, this hard-hitting propaganda film is an historical, didactic, poetic, and satirical comment on American violence from Wild West days to today.

MANDABI (THE MONEY ORDER)

(Oushane Sembene, Senegal, 1968) (F)

Ousame Sembene is Africa's major film talent and this is his best film. Set in present-day Senegal, it recounts the adventures of a dignified, moneyless Moslem, with two wives and many children, who receives a money order from his street-sweeping nephew in Paris. As he attempts to make use of this symbol of Western civilization by cashing it, it re- venges itself by enmeshing him in a web of missing birth certificates, unobtainable identity cards, helpful conmen, and deadly French bureaucrats, until the entire amount has been stolen. At the end, he has to choose: become a "wolf" like everyone else, or help change the country. Sharp naturalistic detail, ethnographic concerns, militant anti-imperialism, and robust humor characterize this jaundiced view of a man and a society in transition, in which neither French nor, significantly, Senegalese emerge as heroes. But while this gentle and seditious "comedy" avoids one-sidedness, it clearly marks the French imperials as villains and the Senegalese as victims. The breaking down of organic, meaningful, tribal patterns under the impact of the West is particularly well shown. Instead of editorializing about imperialism, the film reveals it organically in its implacable storyline. Sembene's work marks the emergence of a truly indigenous African cinema.



MACUNAIMA

(Joachim Pedro de Andrade, Brazil, 1969) (F)

The bizarre first "musical" of the Brazilian Cinema Novo movement ends with a gargantuan open-air party, at which the assorted bourgeois, precariously dangling from trapeze bars, are forced to swing across a piranha-filled swimming pool, with predictably colorful results.

Startling, bizarre, cynical, sexy, this first musical of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement is marked by all its virtues; modernity, vigor, and a radical metaphysics in the service of the revolution. It is so truly indigenous that its mysterious delights and allusions transform us into voyeurs at an alien feast, to whose nuances we reverberate without fully grasping them.

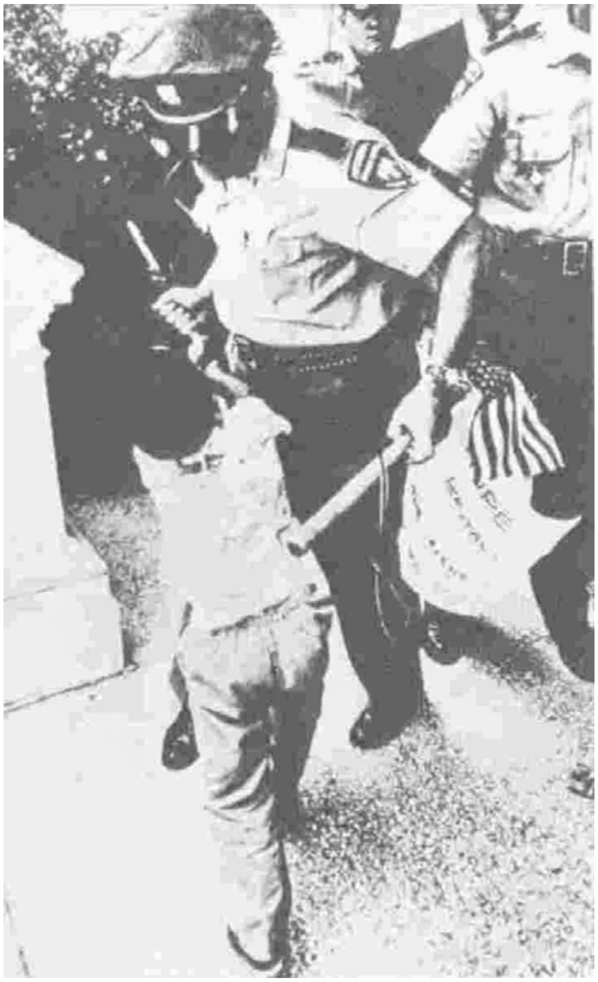
Based on a key work of the Brazilian modernist movement of the 20s, this ironic Odyssey recounts the picturesque, Rabelasian mis-adventures of a "hero without character", a metaphor of Brazil. Moving from jungle to urban guerilla warfare to cannibalism, we are transported from realism to the supernatural with an ease that denotes the presence of true folk art. Along the way, we witness Macunaima's miraculous birth, fully-grown, from beneath the skirts of a hideous woman standing in a hut, and watch his periodic transformations from an ugly Black-Indian-Portuguese into a ridiculous knight, to satisfy the sexual desires of his sister-in-law. Leaving home, he meets an obliging cannibal in street clothes, a

ravishing guerilla fighter who loves red hammocks but unfortunately carries her bombs beneath their baby lying in its carriage.

A con-man sells him a magic duck that defecates instead of laying golden eggs. He gives an impromptu political speech denouncing mosquitoes, balconies, and smallpox only to be branded as a Communist. He talks to a vagrant who persuades him to break his balls and eat them; but there are always willing girls to cure him. After a brief stop-over at a leper colony, the film ends with a gargantuan open-air party, at which assorted bourgeois are forced to swing across a sumptuous swimming pool filled with piranhas, with predictably colorful results.

The visual elegance of the images and decor is as satisfying as the bold use of striking, sensuous colors and compositions. The charmingly bizarre and "naively sophisticated events and ideas testify to the presence of a very modern cosmopolitan sensibility, jaundiced by corruption and class privilege, lovingly aware of the true cultural matrix of his country. To this filmmaker, the cinema is a medium of magic and of revolution: a revolution of attitudes and character rather than of propaganda. A marvelously joyful *melange* of pop tunes accompanies Macunaima's incessant progress to ultimate defeat: a charming vulgarity expresses the film's disregard of puritan conventional values. The multi-racial mixture of cast, events, and bodies totally bypasses the problem of "integration", and a playful, ideologically-based cruelty further contributes to a truly foreign film experience; not every day are we told in the cinema that it is "each man for himself and God against all".

It would be difficult but not impossible to misunderstand this film as a harmless dadaist romp. But the underlying vision is philosophical and dark. The main themes are the Little Man as victim (and, still worse, as accomplice), the world as an alien and inexplicable place, the blind stupidity and implicit cruelty of privilege and class power; and finally, the need to recapture a genuine Brazilian folk ethos, a link with an indigenous culture free of foreign domination. In all these respects, *Macunaima* personifies the best artistic and social aspirations of the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement, that intrepid and desperate band of directors who attempted to portray the real Brazil and whose risks in making their films were not always financial.



NOW

(Santiago Alvarez, Cuba, 1965)

A powerful attack on American racialism, based entirely on newsreel materials and closely edited to Lena Horne's rendition of "Now". Documentary shots often provide symbolic statements: in this case, flag, stick, black boy, policeman, and faceless anonymity of both generalize an event.

PRATO PALOMARES

(Andre Faria, Brazil, 1970) (F)

This extraordinary work has the dubious distinction of being the most famous unseen film of contemporary world cinema. Officially announced at the Cannes Festival for two consecutive years, it was withdrawn both times due to pressure by the Brazilian government. It is a scream of anguish, a nightmare of defeated revolt, and repression, an expressionist confrontation of radical ideology, self-doubt, compromise, incorruptibility, and eternal subversion. Two cornered, wounded guerillas hiding in a church and a mysterious woman who joins them form the center of its delirious tableaux, their desperate talks soon superseded by police (abetted by Americans) who proceed to torture. It is a tribute to Faria's control over his

materials that decapitation and the cutting off of tongues and limbs are accepted as inevitable escalations of the delirium which forms the core of this work. Its cruelty is believable, its paroxysms necessary, its metaphors an extension of *Cinema Novo*, of which it may be the swan song; yet, with one guerilla decapitated and the other co-opted, the woman, who never compromised, continues the struggle -- now mute and without hands -- for a revolution without words.

QUE HACER?

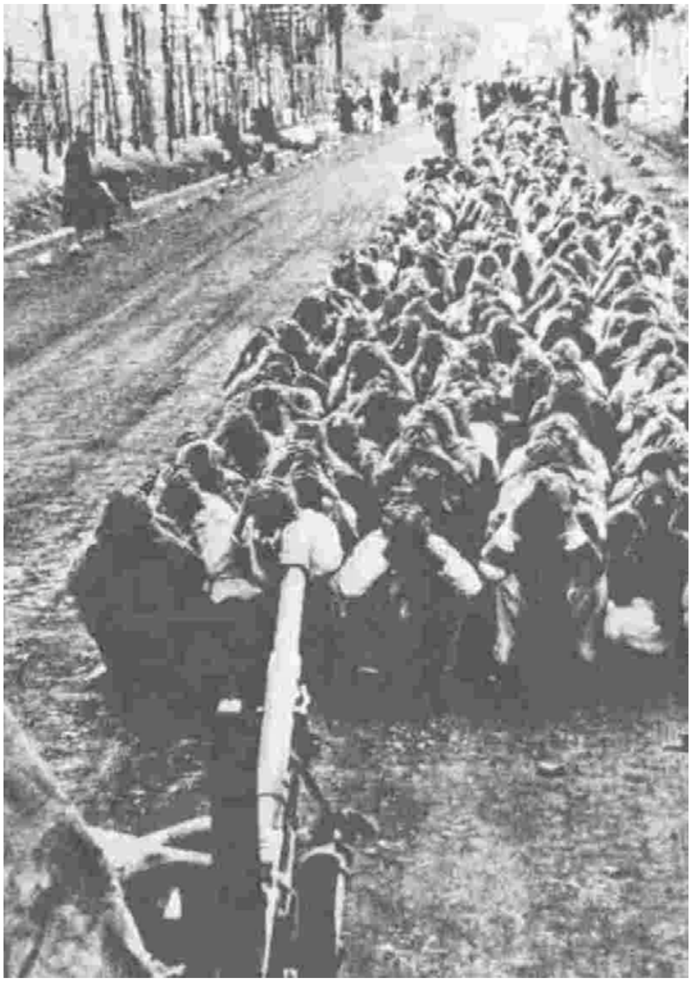
(Saul Landau, James Becket, Raul Ruiz, Nina Serrano, Chile-USA, 1970)

A successful attempt at political cinema by a Chilean-American film collective. Centering on the period of Allende's election, the film interweaves reality (documentary footage), political fiction (a Peace Corps girl, a political kidnapping, Maoists, and the CIA), and, on a third level, the filmmakers themselves, breaking into the continuity of the work. Provocative, fast-moving, and well-edited, this is a serious discussion film which, despite the clear sympathies of its makers, establishes a certain objectivity that distinguishes it from propaganda.

REED: MEXICO INSURGENT
(REED: MEXICO INSURGENTE)

(Paul Leduc, Mexico, 1971) (F)

This film is a notable, oblique work of great subtlety. With John Reed, the left-wing American journalist, we enter, stage by stage, into the true realities of the Mexican (or any other) revolution: lulls and confusions, fallible (that is, human) leaders , bumpy roads, unexpected death, sudden friendships, and meandering half-actions. This is what it must have been like. The sentiment is anti-conventional, anti-folklorist, anti- sentimental, anti-heroic; and, therefore, closer to revolutionary reality. As the film progresses, Reed -- who had planned to "cover an event" he sympathized with -- realizes that he must turn participant; at the end, in a beautifully caught small gesture, he throws a solitary rock at a store window, and becomes a revolutionist.



THE TWILIGHT OF THE DAMNED

(Ahmed Rachedi, Algeria, 1970)

This, too, is part of man's history. Under a French gun, Algerians are victimized in their own country. Nothing is prettified in this documentary shot. The anonymity of victims and victimizers, the ominous greys and blacks, the air of unhealthy anticipation and incipient violence render the precise quality of a moment of historical time.

THE SECRET FORMULA (LA FORMULA SECRETA)

(Ruben Gomez, Mexico, 1966) (F)

Strange, semi-surrealist nightmares -- somehow related to Mexican realities -- form the matrix of this work. A corpse is carried on a flour truck, a boy knifes a cow, a couple kiss before a blood-bespattered wall, clerical students imitated the crucifixion. Perhaps the best scene is of a Mexican staring out silently toward the Mexican plateaux; after a while, the camera pans away from him, to concentrate on the landscape. Stubbornly he re-enters the frame and assumes his former position, the camera pulls away again, and again he returns ... a perfect visual metaphor.

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79 SPRINGTIMES
(79 PRIMAVERAS)
(Santiago Alvarez, Cuba, 1969)

A film tribute, upon his death, to Ho Chi Minh, by Cuba's best documentary filmmaker. Avoiding "official" reverence and propagandistic sentimentality, the film provides a moving portrait of Ho from youth to old age, showing him as an early revolutionist, a modest student, a man on a donkey, a man at a typewriter thinking. The crimes of the Americans, in documentary shots, are cross-cut with Ho's funeral amidst moving expressions of popular grief.

TIME OF VIOLENCE
(TEMPO DI VIOLENCIA)
(Anonymous, Argentina, 1970)

Produced illegally, this is a radical, anti-American agit-prop documentary, filled with amazing sequences of large-scale, violent, unreported street riots in several Argentinian cities. The film is a testimony to the power of censorship -- and the need for clandestine filmmakers to counteract it.

THE HOUR OF THE BLAST FURNACES
(LA HORA DE LOS HORNOS)
(Fernando Solanas, Argentina, 1967) (F)

This subversive masterpiece -- a shattering indictment of American imperialism in South America -- is a brilliant *tour de force* of tumultuous images, sophisticated montage, and sledgehammer titles, fused into a passionate onslaught of radical provocation to olt the spectator to a new level of consciousness. Here is a Marxist film that "rocks": a proudly subjective, passionately dogmatic, totally conscious plea for violent revolution.

The first sequence sets the tone. Accompanied by strident drums, a barrage of images of street violence, flashing by at extreme speed, singly or in clusters is intercut with black, blank frames and a rapid- fire succession of highly political, incendiary titles which (as in Eisenstein's work) become integral components of the work. They burst into the action from right or left, from above or below, all the while catapulting the ideological argument forward as if they were sticks of dynamite. Together with the violent, impressionist images, monstrous statictics, and a montage both brilliant and tendentious, they create a poem of revolt, a compendium of the best modern film techniques in the service of the revolution.

There are unforgettable, searing images: child beggars running alongside a train in a desperate attempt to keep up with it, so that blase passengers might reward them with pennies; in an outdoor hovel, a young prostitute, her pubic area exposed, waiting zombie-like; the Argentinian elite -- not exaggerated types (as in Eisenstein's films) but elegant people, the more horrifying for being "nice"; and a monstrous cemetery for the rich, in which hundreds of huge headstones and crypts, each larger than life-size, merge into a spectacular expressionist set of a mythical city. The most disturbing sequence attacks the throttling of indigenous culture by the sheer weight of the dominant, "alien" Western civilization, so dear and so inviolable to us: Renoir, go-go girls, the Sistine Chapel, Coca-Cola, the Parthenon, and Michelangelo are presented as neo-colonialist tools to depoliticalize the masses and render them apathetic. The film ends with one of the most daring examples of minimal cinema for political ends ever: a close-up of Che's face in death, hovering over us, immobile, for a full 3 minutes. The camera never moves. The image is eternal. We are forced to contemplate the challenge of this man's life and death.

Here, then, is a film that states clearly what the Latin radical intellectual thinks. It is an inescapable, shattering confrontation that also explains the atavistic, "alien" and indigenous violence behind the Brazilian *Cinema Novo* movement and such films as *Antonio-Das-Mortes*. But what is the presumed audience? The very sophistication of its structure and narration -- for example, its repeated use of the term "Balkanization" of Latin America -- precludes its use with the masses and stamps it as a work for intellectuals, students, and the already convinced. To others, its facts resemble allegations, its revolutionary purity dogmatism and its transformation of images into polemic through editing, demagogic distortion. **SC**

THE HOUR OF THE BLAST FURNACES
(LA HORA DE LOS HORNOS)
(Fernando Solanas, Argentina, 1967) (F)

A subversive masterpiece of Third World radical cinema ends with an example of minimal art in the service of politics; a close-up of Che's face in death, hovering over the viewer, immobile, for fully 3 minutes. The image is eternal. SC

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

AKTION J

(Walter Heynowski, East Germany, 1961)

One of the most sensational East German "expose" films of former Nazi leaders continuing in leading positions in post-war West Germany concentrated on the case of Dr. Hans Globke, Secretary of State to the then Chancellor Adenauer. Here, in a Nazi news-reel shot used in the film, Globke appears in his earliest incarnation as one of the main architects of Jewish extermination in Nazi-occupied Europe.

EAST GERMANY:
AGAINST THE WEST

FILMS

HOLIDAY ON SYLT
(URLAUB AUF SYLT)

(Annelie and Andrew Thorndike, East Germany, 1959)

This hard-hitting indictment is possibly the most successful of the Thorndike series, The Archives Testify. Diligent research among Nazi film, law, and literary archives, revealed the then mayor of a popular West German resort town on the island of Sylt to have been a leading SS general, perpetrator of war crimes (visual- ly documented), and the man who broke the resistance movement in Warsaw. A pounding, factual, and authoritative soundtrack -- pointing to documents, files, letters, photographs, and newsreels -- is crosscut with pictures of corpses, executions, and interviews with survivors. According to Jay Leyda's book, *Films Begat Films*, two West German cameramen were sentenced to jail for having tricked the Mayor into allowing an interview for what they knew to be (but he did not) this film.

O.K.

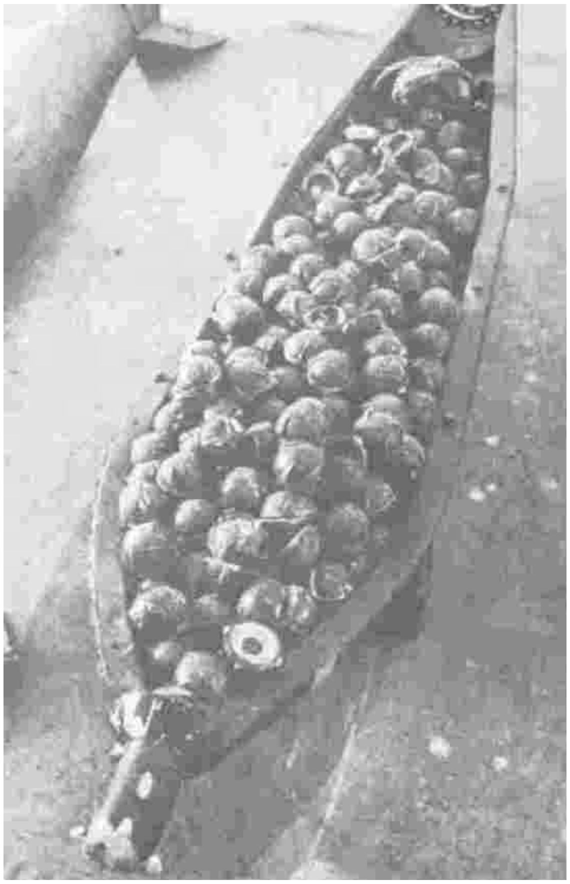
(Walter Heynowski, East Germany, 1964)

Taken from a family album, this documentary shot shows a former East German girl, now a barmaid in West Germany, being further corrupted by an American soldier. The use of sex for propagandistic attacks

titillates East Germans otherwise carefully insulated from eroticism and reveals the puritanism of the regime.

This fascinating and unique film is unfortunately almost entirely unknown in the West. The girl, Doris S., leaves East Germany in 1961 to join her father in West Germany. Three years later, she returns and tells the camera why she returned. The reason is simple: West Germany is a country of moral and sexual corruption, full of bars, American soldiers, American cars, alcohol, and prostitution. Doris S. succumbed to both commercial sex and drinking, but finally decided to return to clean living in East Germany.

Clearly designed to discourage actual or potential emigration from East into West Germany, the film nevertheless operates on a second, unintended level as well. For in this lengthy interview, Doris reveals non-verbal and unmistakable signs of fear and coercion, reinforced by the stenatorian, Prussian style of the interviewer (rather, cross-examiner). Hesitation on her part is met with a sharp "Out with it!", and one suddenly realizes that the girl's freedom is at stake, and that she was in fact subtly coerced into making this film. ("We have had access to your diary ... tell us about it ....") Worse still, there is continued emphasis on sexual matters, with close-ups of this pretty, fearful girl; her relations with American soldiers are emphasized and, in a sensational abberation from "Communist" ideology, the old German-Nazi bogeyman of "Rassenschande" is trotted out in reference to her having slept with Black soldiers. The result is sexual titillation for the East German petty-bourgeois audience, otherwise carefully protected from eroticism. The strenuous, lecherous, transparent attempts of the invisible interviewer successfully to elicit sexual titillating ("Of course, you had to show your American clients your personal charms?") and politically damning information from the coolly controlled, yet obviously tense girl are frightening, as nervous gestures of the victim quite clearly reveal her simply as having exchanged her presumable sexual bondage to the Americans with another, possibly more dangerous dependence. At the end, the invisible man truly becomes a pornographic Big Brother as, satisfied with her performance on camera, he magnanimously ladles out a (small) drink to this obviously alcoholic girl -- to drink on camera. The implicit obscenity of this unfair interview is staggering. Though the social problem raised is real enough -- the presence of large numbers of women-less and well-paid (by German standards) American soldiers -- there has rarely been as effective an unintentional self-indictment as this film.



PILOTS IN PAJAMAS
(PILOTEN IM PYJAMA)

(Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, East Germany, 1968) (F)

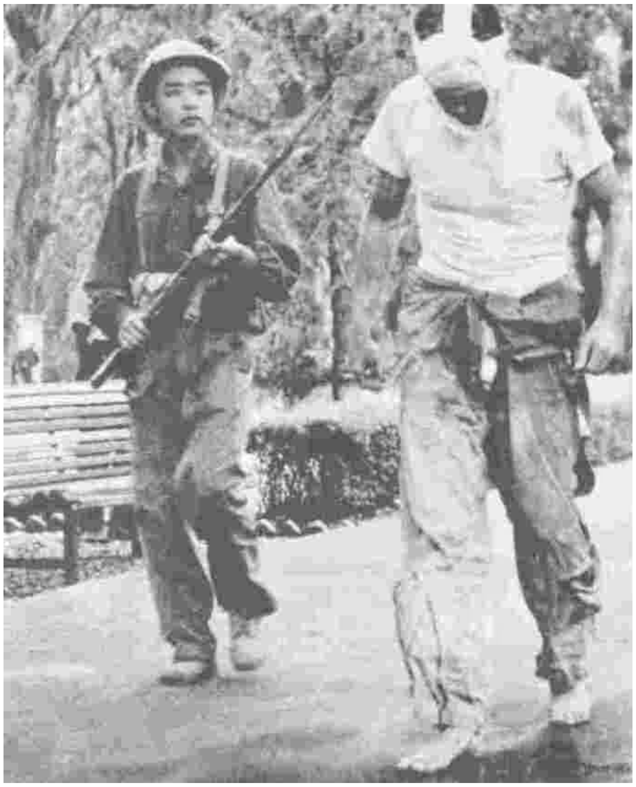
This East German documentary about American POW's in North Vietnam, also showed American weapons used there. Rarely discussed in the West, their inhumanity is staggering. This bomb opens to explode six hundred individual bombs solely designed for use against human beings.

This film, actually several feature films combined into one, consists entirely of interviews with American POWs in North Vietnam. The Americans talk at great length about their lives, values, and Vietnam experiences, in consistently fascinating exchanges with the invisible interviewers. In the process, more is revealed than intended, on both sides. The American ceremonies should be published in the West for the light they throw on the new impersonal, "remote-control" killers of our day; "honorable men", all of them. But the East German revelation is equally fascinating; for the obscene but quite serious premise of this film, in their eyes, is that these were freely conducted interviews among equals. The filmmakers do not seem to realize that some of the prisoners sweat profusely while talking, that all make pro-Vietcong statements, and that there is fear in the back of their eyes; Heynowski, at a press conference, expressed surprise that the pilots addressed him with "Yes, Sir" -- "I don't know why they did that ... " They did it because, given the circumstances of its production, such a film, far from being "cinema verite", is a particularly pernicious (since unacknowledged) kind of courtroom interrogation without the usual safeguards and with the prisoner already under lock and key, imagining that good behavior before the camera may in some way improve his condition.

PILOTS IN PAJAMAS
(PILOTEN IM PYJAMA)

(Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, East Germany, 1968) (F)

A captured American pilot being interviewed in a North Vietnamese prison for an East German documentary. The interview, the place, the man, and what he says, are all "real"; but he is under duress and reality is further manipulated by lighting, positioning, and ominous shadows.



PILOTS IN PAJAMAS
(PILOTEN IM PYJAMA)

(Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, East Germany, 1968) (F)

Technological man in trouble; he even lacks shoes, as against "primitive" captor. An unstaged newsreel images yields more truth than careful fictional recreation, felt in the distance between them, the differences in head positioning, body size, and attire. Behind them: bench and shrubbery (well-kept despite war) and the rich vegetation so cruelly devastated by the prisoner's compatriots.

SUPERIOR TOYS - MADE IN THE USA
(FEINE SPIELWAREN - MADE IN USA)

(Guenter Raetz, East Germany, 1969) (F)

This film is a slashing, frontal attack, skillfully edited, on American war toys ("sold in West Germany") showing Nazi soldiers and tanks, and Fokker, von Richtofen, and Stuka planes. ("Have the Americans forgotten that these planes bombed England?") For good measure, the film ends with monster toys, torture chambers, the Bloody Mummy, and an operating guillotine ("we apologize for showing this in an East German film"). The conclusion is that even toys have been put at the service of aggressive American imperialism, which aims at achieving Hitler's unattainable goal: the destruction of the socialist bloc.

THE LAUGHING MAN

(Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, East Germany, 1967)

Posing as a West German TV production crew, the two East German directors of this film persuaded a former leading German mercenary of the Congo civil war (one of many!) to discuss his activities and heroic achievements in what is surely one of the most sensational exposes of its kind.

Continually smiling or laughing, this man, a self-acknowledged Nazi, proudly reveals that he went to the Congo to save Western civilization from Bolshevism -- to complete the work of the Nazis. Dressed in his military jungle uniform (with his Second World War decorations) he waxes eloquent about the "colors" of South Africa, "explains" apartheid, and freely discusses his "adventures". Shots of corpses, tortures, and executions of Blacks are intercut. It is not often that one can see and hear a real, "live" Nazi in action, talking (more or less) freely because he presumed himself to be among friends instead of with two of the most clever political propagandists of our time, working for the other side.

THE LAUGHING MAN

(Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, East Germany, 1967)

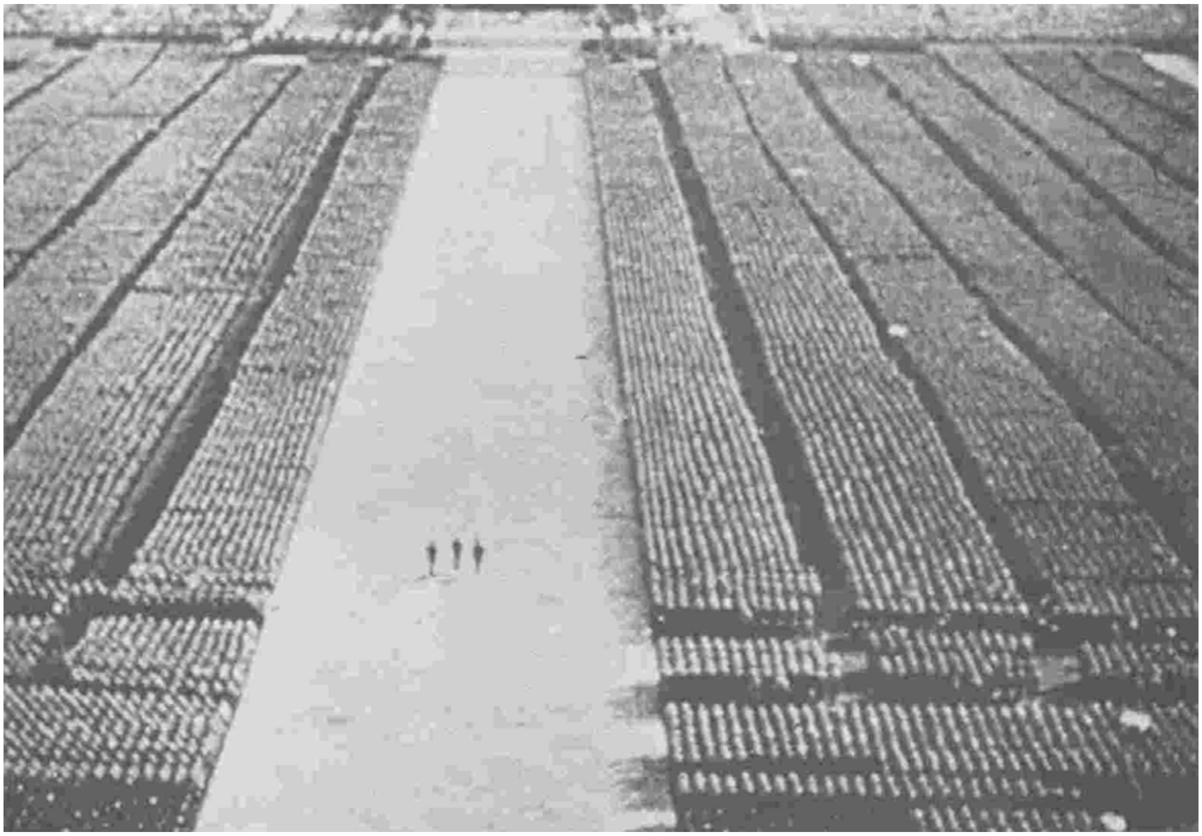
This jovial man who never stops smiling is a real, "live" former Nazi in action, talking freely about his "adventures" as German mercenary during the Congo civil war (tortures, executions, killings) because he -- mistakenly -- believes himself to be talking to friends. But the interviewers parading as a West German TV crew are really the East's most clever political filmmakers.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART



TRIUMPH OF THE WILL
(TRIUMPH DES WILLENS)
(Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1936) (F)
Unquestionably the most impressive single image of the Nazi period, a perfect representation of its Fuhrer-Mass ideology. The lonely grandeur of Hitler, Himmler, and SA leader Lutze traversing the entire length of the stadium is visually orchestrated into a sequence of awesome power. SC

THE TERRIBLE POETRY OF NAZI CINEMA

Whether history -- the knowledge and remembrance of things past -- can be transmitted to new generations as a cautionary tale or guide

to action, is a moot question. There is terrifying evidence -- books, schools, and philosophers to the contrary -- that life begins at birth and with oneself, and that what preceded it is both incomprehensible and invisible. Perhaps it is therefore only those who lived through the Hitler era who know its reality; to new generations, it is a quaint and not entirely terrifying tale of the mythical past, difficult to believe and, in any case, "completed" in that its outcome is known. Hiroshima, the Congo, Vietnam, and Chile are already moving into the same void to become the stuff of history books. Yet, in every generation, an attempt is made, against heavy odds, to carry past experiences forward into the future for others to ponder or avoid.

In the case of Hitler's regime, particularly excellent study material exists in the form of Nazi films. Though the movement and its leaders, their cities and diabolic diversions are gone forever, the Nazis do continue to exist on film, their initial frightfulness encapsulated and rendered acceptable for study.

The Nazi regime arose from real and recognizable causes: defeat, depression, huge unemployment, unprecedented inflation, decadence of society, moral and personal corruption, irreconcilable class warfare, national stagnation, and aborted revolution. The Nazis contrasted with this the dream of a Third Reich, cleansed of dissidents and corruption, united, strong, pure in its racial strength; from the ashes, a rebirth of the nation.

The dream found its catalyst in the master psychologist, Hitler, whose *Mein Kampf* remains a unique psycho-political primer, a vicious, extraordinary compendium of mob manipulation. Only someone exceptionally gifted could have so fully understood the depths of our atavistic unconscious.

Hitler's unending and sadistic love affair with the masses as explicitly outlined in *Mein Kampf* is predicated on a psycho-analytically fascinating construct of Fuhrer (male element, superman, repository of national wisdom and will) seducing (by means of propaganda) the masses below (the female element). Given historical evidence, an entirely tenable interpretation of one facet of Hitler's personality postulates that if a monomaniac cannot "make" it with a woman, he attempts to make it with an entire nation; in this view, *Mein Kampf* also serves as a surrogate sex manual outlining seduction by proxy. That there was sexual tension between mass and Fuhrer -- with pseudo-orgasms on both sides -- cannot be denied by anyone acquainted with Hitler's speeches and the audience's reaction.

The masses, says Hitler in Mein Kampf, are simple, uneducated, inferior, and lazy. "Their receptivity is limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous." (1)

> **Like the woman, whose psychic state is determined less by abstract reason than by an indefinable emotional longing for a force which will complement her nature,**

> **and who, consequently, would rather bow to a strong man than dominate a weakling, likewise the masses love a commander more than a petitioner ... (2)**
>
> **In their overwhelming majority they are so feminine by nature that sober reasoning determines their thoughts and actions far less than emotions and feelings. (3)**

To convince them, one needs propaganda; and this must be addressed to their level (intellectuals will be repelled by it). Propaganda does not "deal" with a question; it only touches on it. It should be simple, easily accessible, (4) addressed to emotion, not intellect, and adjusted to "the most limited intelligence". The greater the mass, the lower its intellectual level will be. Propaganda is not scientific: "its task is not to make an objective study of the truth (in so far as it favors the enemy) and then set it before the masses with academic fairness; its task is to serve our own right, always and unflinchingly." (5) Propaganda, like advertising, is to confine itself to a few points, repeated again and again; "only after the simplest ideas are repeated thousands of times will the masses finally remember them." Propaganda must concentrate on one foe, one issue, and not be concerned with subtlety; "it belongs to the genius of a great leader to make even more adversaries far removed from one another seem to belong to a single category." (7) The "seduction" of the masses should preferably take place at night, (8) at mass meetings, (9) at which the Fuhrer is best able to exercise his powers over the supine, receptive mass below; under these conditions suggestive intoxication and enthusiasm lead to its succumbing to mass suggestion. (10)

There exists, however, another means of propaganda as powerful as the mass meeting: the cinema. "Here a man needs to use his brains even less ... He will accept pictorial representation more readily than a newspaper article ... a picture brings enlightenment much more quickly -- I might also say, at one stroke." (11) The darkness of the cinema makes the mass succumb more easily to the dominating will of the Fuhrer, just as the darkness of night makes women succumb more easily. This, according to Hitler, also explains the utilization of mysterious twilight in Catholic churches -- the Roman Catholic Church being to him, after Bolshevism, the second most important agency of propaganda. (12) Hitler's crude anti-feminism ("The German girl is a subject and only becomes a citizen when she marries." (13) , his contempt for the masses, and his realization of the subversive potential of cinema (both he and Goebbels had been profoundly affected by Eisenstein's *Potemkin*) led him to the production of the most famous propaganda film ever made -- *Triumph of the Will*. It is fascinating that the task of creating this work was handed by Hitler to -- a woman.

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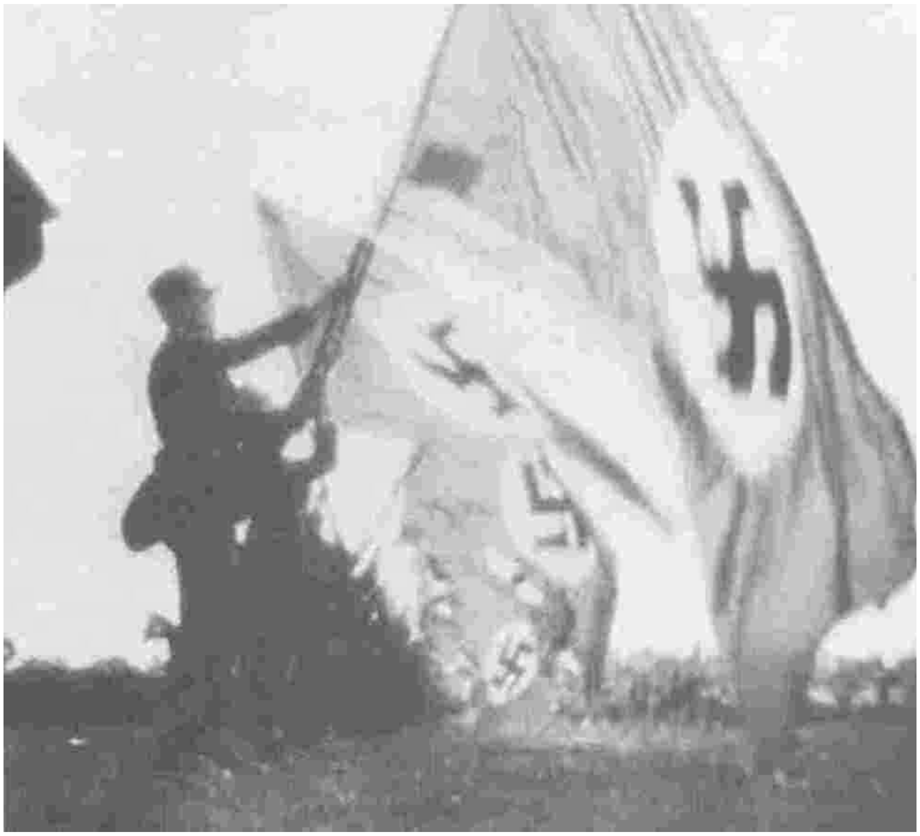
FILMS



TRIUMPH OF THE WILL
(TRIUMPH DES WILLENS)

(Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1936) (F)

In 1934, the Nazi leadership -- one year old -- was as yet relatively unknown both at home and abroad, to speed the process of recognition, Hitler convoked a national party convention in the form of a week-long monster rally in Nuremberg. In addition to bringing one million party members to the city, the event was to serve the international dissemination of the new Nazi myth by means of a film spectacle of a scope never before attempted.

Hitler called upon Leni Riefenstahl, whose earlier mystic *Das Blaue Licht* he had greatly admired. Riefenstahl, unquestionably one of the greatest of women film directors, was given an almost unlimited budget, 130 technicians, almost 90 cameramen (on roller-skates, lifts, bridges, towers, and huge platforms built solely for the occasion), and one million extras, more than appeared in *Intolerance* or *Cleopatra*. However, the most startling aspect of the project was the creation of an artificial universe that looked entirely real and the resulting production of the first and most important example ever of an "authentic documentary" of a pseudo-event. It is a stupendous revelation to realize that this whole enormous convention was primarily staged for the film.

> The preparations for the party congress were made *in concert*(my emphasis - A.V.) with the preparations for the camera work -- that is, the event was planned not only as a spectacular mass meeting -- but as a spectacular propaganda film ... the ceremonies, and precise plans of the parades, marches, processions -- the *architecture*(my emphasis - A.V.) of the halls and stadium were designed for the convenience of the cameras.
>
> It does not matter whether everything appears in proper chronological order in this film. Its creative dynamism required me to instinctively shape it out of the real experience of Nuremberg in such a way that it catapults the spectator from scene to scene, from impression to impression in an ever more overpowering manner ... I look for the inner dramatic structure of this recreation. It comes into being as soon as the film materials, the speeches, the mass shots and close-ups, marches and music, pictures of Nuremberg night and morning, become symphonically heightened to such an extent that they finally do justice to the "spirit" of the Nuremberg event6 ... (1)

In a post-war interview, Riefenstahl stated: "I owe this film several years imprisonment -- but when you look at it today, you will see that not a single scene is staged. Everything is genuine. And there is no tendentious commentary for the simple reason that there is no commentary at all. It is *history* -- *pure history*." (2) (my emphasis - A.V.)

Brave lies; for the whole film -- here referred to by Riefenstahl in an unguarded moment as a "recreation", actually takes place in artificial time and space; it is "manufactured" history. Before our very eyes, says Kracauer in what remains the most perceptive (yet incomplete) analysis of the film, life becomes an apparition; reality is absorbed into an artificial event.

> Aspects open here as confusing as the series of reflected images in a mirror-maze; from the real life of the people was built up a faked reality, which, instead of being an end in itself, merely served as the set dressing for a film that was then to assume the character of an authentic documentary. (3)

The star of the film is Hitler -- the only Nazi film in which he so appears. He arrives "from the clouds" in a now ridiculously dated airplane -- the savior, coming from where all the gods live, while below the supine mass waits for deliverance. He is kind, omnipotent, firm, possessed, ubiquitous, a symbol of strength and of the soul of the nation. He is male -- like all Nazi leaders (just as raised-arm salute and goose-step were erection symbols). To make him into a superman, all his failings -- i.e. what makes

him human -- have been painted out; both he and the film are perfect and there is not a single false step anywhere. He is frequently photographed from below, high on a pedestal against the sky, or in slow, caressing pans. Even when he is in a crowd, he is alone. In one of the greatest scenes of the film, an enormous long-shot taking in the entire expanse of the stadium, Hitler, Himmler, and SA leader Lutze are shown walking its length along a wide central aisle left open on both sides by tens of thousands of SA and SS men, completely filling the screen, to place a wreath for the German First World War dead. The three slowly traverse the enormous length of the stadium, against the background of the multitude; the effect is overpowering.

However, Hitler is the only individual left; the other Germans merely appear as part of a huge collective. Individualism and bourgeois democracy are finished. In this monstrous, primeval rite, the mass -- anonymous and hypnotized -- never acts; it only reacts to the Fuhrer's initiatives, delivered in authoritarian, hysterical, obsessive, and deafening fashion. Everything is designed for seduction: the sensory overload of high-pitched, propagandistically inflamed oratory, the massed bands and banners, the rhythm of goose-step and drums, the sentimentality of old German songs, and the shots of old Nuremberg, linking the new regime to the national past. Even language become ritualistic, incantatory; as when Hess, extolling Hitler, refers to him as "flesh of our flesh / blood of our blood / before us -- lies Germany / behind us -- there is Germany / the party is -- Hitler / but Hitler is -- Germany / and Germany is -- Hitler". All these devices trigger symbols derived from the collective unconcious; it is its conscious manipulation that constitutes propaganda. As Hitler so clearly explains, propaganda is a device to inhibit, not to extend understanding. Information is distorted and withheld at the moment that atavistic symbols are activated, resulting in psychic regression to more primitive levels. (4)

The basic components of mass manipulation outlined by Hitler remain the same for all propaganda regardless of source (American right-wing films, East German attacks on the USA, Nixon's TV speeches, Cuban propaganda films). A recent example is *The Hellstrom Chronicle*, a fraudulent "documentary" amalgam of extraordinary nature footage, tendentious editing, and pseudo-scientific narration that predicts the impending destruction of mankind by its "real" enemy, insects.

But despite their carefully prescribed parameters, propaganda films, precisely because of their calculated nature, are, in fact, subversive; they contaminate not merely the truth, but all who come near them; witness the ominous, perverse attraction of *Triumph of the Will* even today.

It's power also derives from the specificity of the image, its palapable concreteness which erroneously makes it appear as a guarantor of truth.

(Pictures, Nixon quite seriously claimed in one of his flights of profundity, do not lie.) This is further reinforced in documentary cinema by the accepted assumption of non-fictional reality. The subversive tyranny of images can only begin to be broken when this assumption is exposed as falsehood. Reality is unordered; film is ordered. The images, in the context of a constructed work, is never neutral. It is chosen and its boundaries defined by the filmmaker before shooting, in a subjective process of selection, arrangement, omission, and emphasis; even camera angles and movement, choice of film speed and filters, lighting and sound influence our reaction. The image's position and duration in the completed film are once again subjectively determined by the filmmaker creating his own rhythms, metaphors, amalgams, analogies, or contrasts. The whole process, subjective from beginning to end, becomes an ideal mechanism for conscious manipulation of audiences by the propagandist.

In the last analysis, the shocking intellectual emptiness one feels when emerging from *Triumph of the Will*'s induced stupor only reinforces its mythological and propagandistic intenmtion; it was not meant to represent a convocation of equals, demo- cratically discussing ideology and tactics. It is precisely because of its profound appeal to unconscious elements and its masterful orchestration of filmic and psychological components that the nightmarish incantation of *Triumph of the Will* must be classified as a profoundly subversive, profoundly dangerous masterpiece of visual cinema. SC

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HITLER YOUTH QUEX (HITLERJUNGE QUEX)

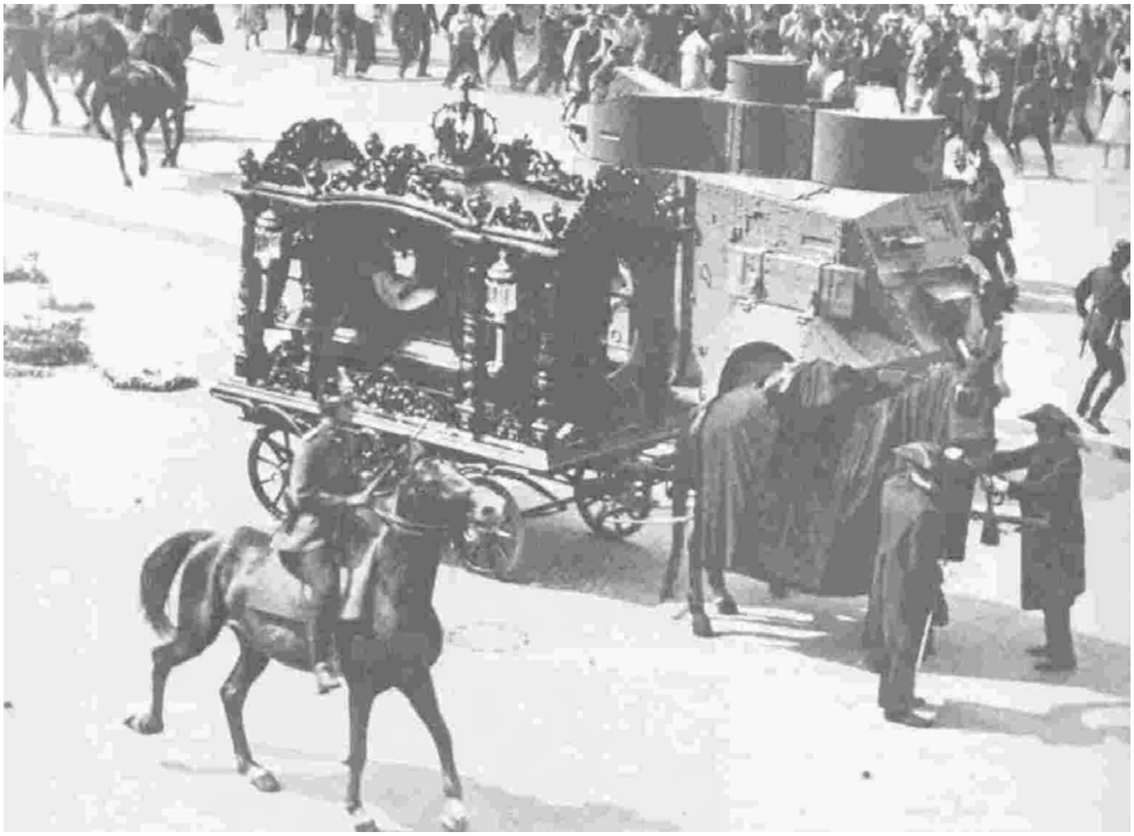
(Hans Steinoff, Germany, 1933) (F)

Self-portrayal of the Nazi idol; frightening, faintly ridiculous totalitarian (masculinity enhanced by uniform), carrying a big stick, and not speaking softly. There is an air of raving, of striking terror into the hearts of others. The indistinct figures (appropriately in the background), are Hitler youth about to be "moulded". SC

BAPTISM OF FIRE (FEUERTAUFE)

(Hans Bertram, Germany, 1940) (F)

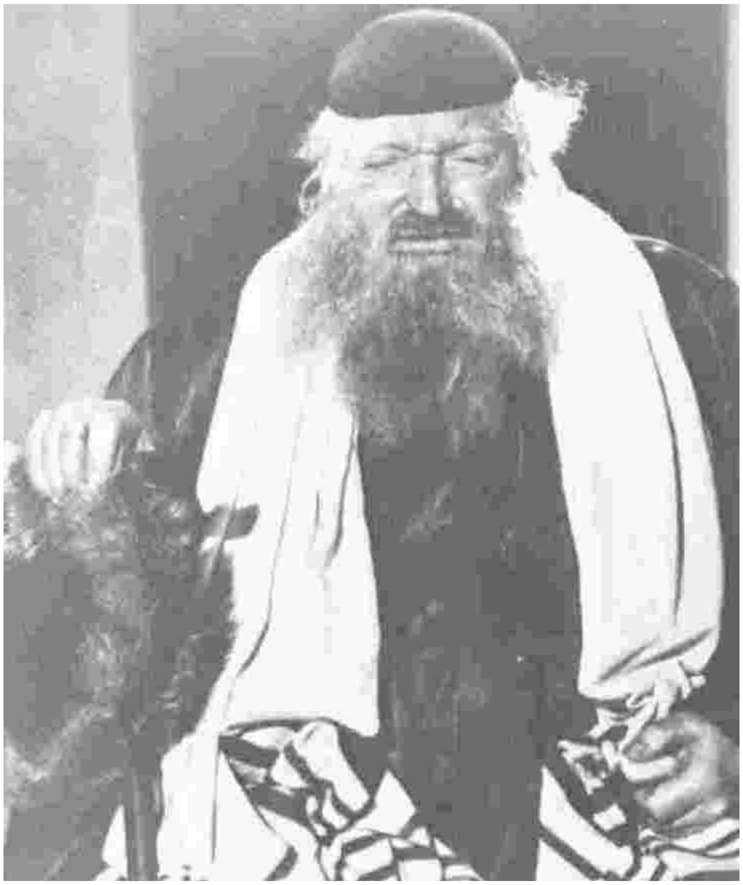
Though entirely based on "authentic" newsreel materials, this is a splendid distorted "record" of the Nazi Blitzkrieg against Poland, designed to terrorize (particularly foreign) viewers into accepting the Nazis' god-like military superiority. Kracauer's profound analysis stresses the magic, irrational core of the film, its reliance on graceful over-simplifications, clever amalgams, a pseudo- narration that professes to inform, and insidious comparisons. Particularly frightening are its terrifying maps of encirclement and destruction from above. Strength and decisiveness are constantly stressed; suffering is, at most, cartographic, and death entirely absent.



HANS WESTMAR

(Franz Wenzler, Germany, 1933) (F)

In 1933, a Nazi filmmaker produced, from newsreels,
a record of the funeral of Nazi martyr Horst Wessel
(presumably killed by Communists) revealing it
as a modest affair, poorly attended. The same year,
a fictional treatment of this event made it "heroic",
adding richly ornate hearse, armored carrier, and
thousands of rioting Communists in a complete fabrication.



THE JEW SUSS
(JUD SUSS)

(Veit Harlan, Germany, 1940) (F)

The great German actor Werner Krauss as the evil Rabbi Loew in one of the most sinister anti-semitic films ever made. So detailed and particular is Krauss' recreation -- even mouth and eyes attempt to imitate the archetypical Jew -- that a strange dignity suddenly begins to come through. SC

THE ETERNAL JEW
(DER EWIGE JUDE)

(Fritz Hippler, Germany, 1940) (F)

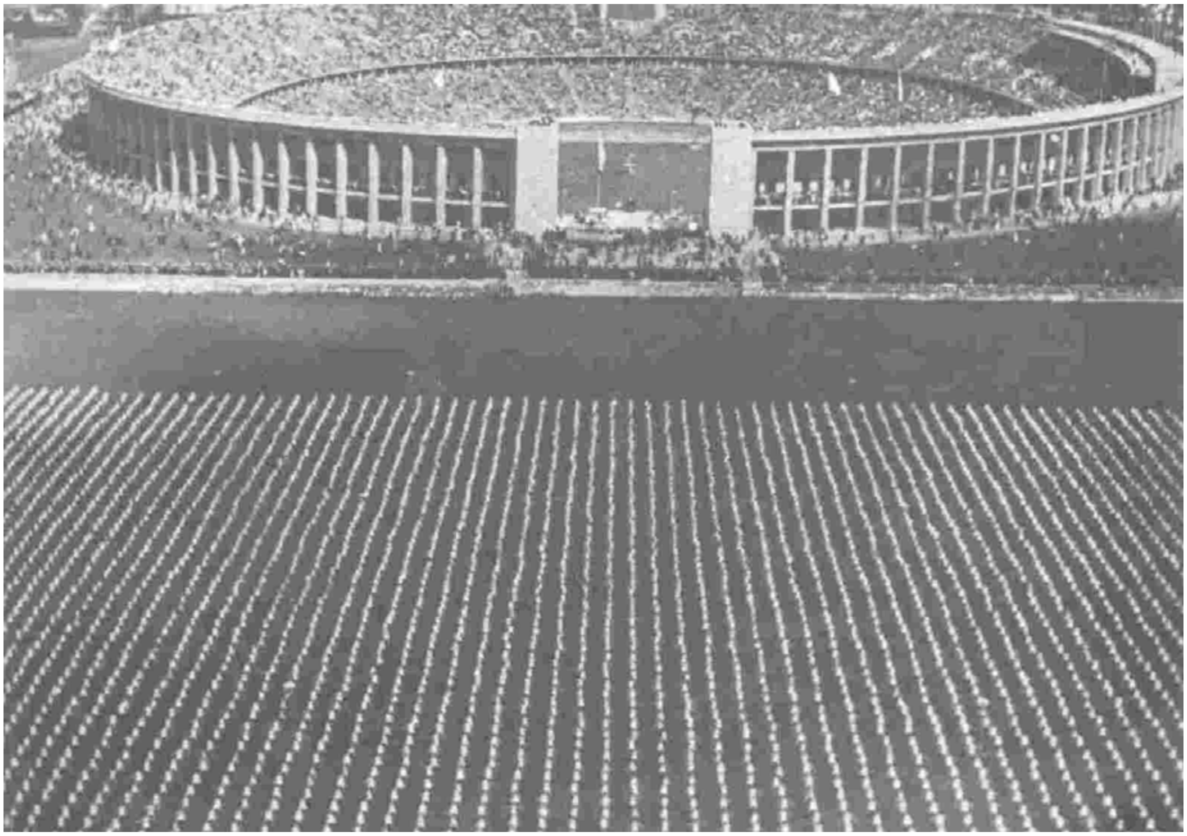
It is a tragic irony that almost the only remaining visual records of a now vanished civilization -- East European Jewry -- should reach us through the films of those who destroyed it. Here, "documentary" shots are subverted by montage and narration into anti-semitic propaganda. SC

This is the most subversive film ever made against a particular race or nationality group; there is no other like it in film history. It purports to be a study of "the problem of world Jewry" and utilizes documentary footage to expound its virulently anti-semitic philosophy. It is an object lesson in the manipulation of the materials of reality, in the use of montage and, particularly, of narration for purposes of progaganda parading as objective truth. Shown widely in Nazi Germany, the occupied Low Countries, and France, it helped justify the "final solution" of the Jewish problem by means of extermination. Even today, its visual impact is still considered so threatening that it is never shown, and exists only in a few archives. A screening at the American film society "Cinema 16" in 1958 -- the only one of its kind -- was first stopped by the American customs and only took place after intervention on State Departmental level.

"The civilized Jews with whom we are acquainted in Germany," says the narration, "offer us only an incomplete picture of their racial characteristics. This film shows original pictures from the Polish ghettos; it shows the Jews as they really are, before they hide themselves under the mask of the civilized European." It is indeed ironical that the most complete and only filmic coverage of Eastern ghetto life (now vanished) should be preserved for posterity by means of the most anti-Jewish film ever made. For here we see horrible

scenes of poverty, degradation, and heart-rending faces of people who were to die within the year; many frightened, but attempting to hide their fear as this would be a mark against them, or smiling, even acting (to please the Nazi filmmakers). "The home life of the Jews shows his inability to become civilized. Jewish homes are dirty and in complete disorder." The narrative goes on to explain how the Jew does not like to work; he prefers to make shady deals and cheat the Aryans as ordered by Moses. His origin is in the Orient and a "surprising parallel to the Jewish migrations of an equally restless animal -- the rats." Here shots of vast hordes of rats scurrying about are cross-cut with mass shots of Jews. "The rats accompany man as a parasite from his very beginning; wherever rats appear, they carry death, spread leprosy, plague, typhus, cholera. They are cunning, cowardly and cruel and always appear in large numbers. They represent, among animals, the same element of treachery and destruction as the Jews do among humans." The film then proceeds -- always illustrated by well chosen visuals and naming names -- to show that Jews are variously gangsters, Bolsheviks, degenerated artists, international bankers, white slavers, con-men and lechers. Excerpts from motion pictures involving Jews are used and often not identified as such, transforming fictional incidents into generalized characterizations of a race. Einstein is referred to as "the Relativity- Jew Einstein", and New York and America are shown to be dominated by Jewish bankers, as are the left-wing parties of Western Europe. "The concept of beauty is alien to them"; they prefer cubism, expressionism, and jazz. "Here we see an entire group of Polish Jews, previously dressed in their kaftans, and now in West European clothing, cleanly shaven, ready to infiltrate Western Europe." Yiddish ("alien") words are juxtaposed with Western music. Ritual slaughter is depicted in detail to reveal its "inhuman barbarism".

This unprecedented opportunity to study actual Nazi propaganda at first hand provides an object lesson of overriding significance; all visual material is inherently neutral and can be made to serve any purpose by clever montage and soundtrack manipulation. It would be possible to take large sections of this film and provide them with a sympathetic commentary, stressing the Jews' plight in Eastern Europe and their cultural achievements elsewhere. (Such an experiment exists in the case of the American documentary *Operation Abolition*, which accompanied shots of left-wing demonstrations against the House Committee on Un-American Activities with strongly anti-Communist narration; a short time later, the American Civil Liberties Union produced a reply, *Operation Correction*, which consisted of the same footage, in the same order, but accompanied by a diametrically opposed narration providing facts and corrections not contained in the earlier work.) Kracauer is right in considering the predominance of language in *The Eternal Jew* a weakness, making it inferior to *Triumph of the Will*; yet the semblance of objectivity it offered in its dense visual and aural documentation and its intentional sensory overload of rapid-fire accusations and allegations have made this into one of the most dangerous films ever produced. SC



TRIUMPH OF THE WILL
(TRIUMPH DES WILLENS)
(Leni Riefenstahl, Germany, 1936) (F)
Camera positioning expresses Nazi ideology; the death of individualism, the compulsion to conform and obey, the perfection of the faceless, manipulated mass. As if the thousands of gymnasts were not enough, there is the imposing stadium and its multitudes in the back. SC

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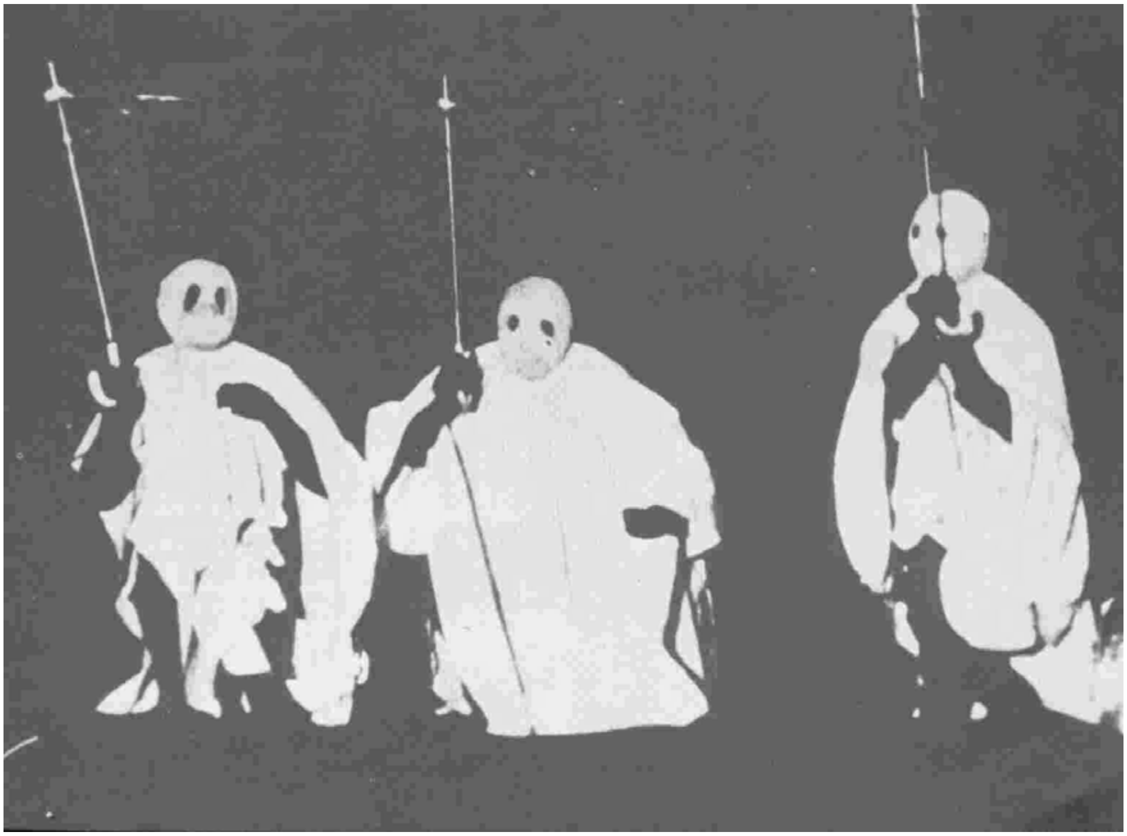


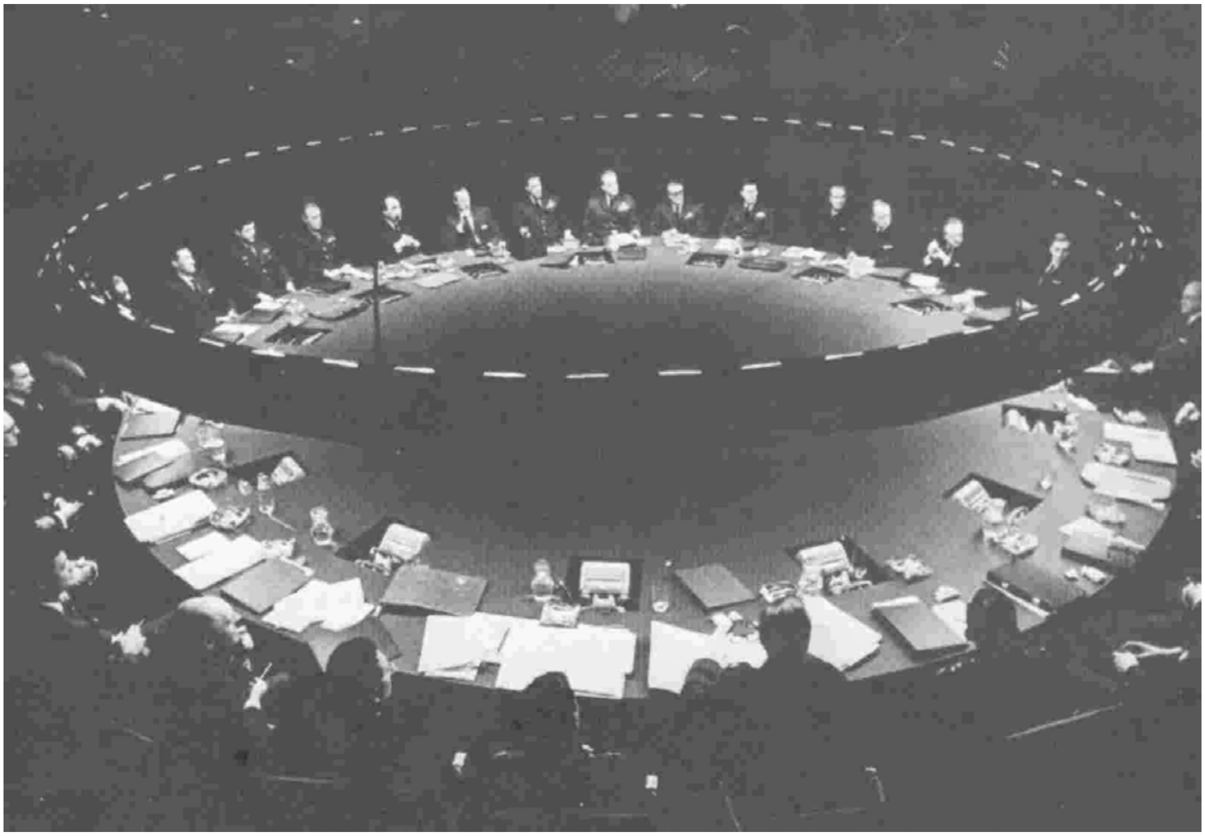
THE RULES OF THE GAME

(Jean Renoir, France, 1938) (F)

A skeleton dance -- performed during a festive weekend at a French chateau -- becomes the macabre symbol of Renoir's sublime and secret commentary on a bourgeoisie on the brink of collapse. The "rules of the game" are in deadly social code: the use of masks in social and personal relationships. Banned by the Vichy government, panned by American critics -- and one of the most important films ever made.

SECRETS AND REVELATIONS

FILMS



DR. STRANGELOVE, OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB

(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1964)

The spatial arrangements, because perfectly circular, seem perfectly orderly, ultra-efficient, and under control; the actions of the men inhabiting them, however, are those of buffoons whose tragic failures and corruptions lead to mankind's destruction. SC

ACUPUNCTURAL ANAESTHESIA

(Peking Television, People's Republic of China, 1971?)

This sensational documentary visually subverts most fundamentally both Western medicine and Western metaphysical systems. In one shocking sequence after another, it portrays the cutting open of bodies and removal of lungs, gall bladders, and stomachs on camera, with patients observed, in the same shot, as fully conscious. A few minutes later, the patients sit up, are shown the removed organ in a pan, smile, talk, eat, and applaud the doctors who applaud them in turn. Since this action is in long-shot, without interruption, it is authentic, hence overwhelming. More significantly, it reveals an entirely non-metaphysical attitude toward body and organs; and a tolerance by Chinese television audiences of visual taboos for which we are altogether unprepared.

For us, operations still involve the violation of what are subconsciously considered inviolable body surfaces and the spilling of "real" blood; and many remain affected by an atavistic dread when confronted by such sights.

AI
(LOVE)

(Yoji Kuri, Japan, 1964)

A corrosive comment on romantic love by the brilliant Japanese animator; a bedraggled male is chased endlessly in alienated landscapes by a voracious female continually repeating the word "Ai" ("love", in Japanese). Her attempts at domesticating him with a chain fail; but the chase continues, forever.

BEAUTY KNOWS NO PAIN

(Elliot Erwitt, USA, 1971)

On one level, this amazing and secret film is a first-rate documentary of the rigorous training and indoctrination of some attractive Texas co-eds for the Kilgore Rangerette Team, a nationally famous corps of marching majorettes performing on television and at sports events. On another level, however -- in its portrayal of false values instilled and the over-all insipidness of an enterprise undertaken with utmost seriousness by its perpetrators -- it must be read as a corrosive critique of bourgeois America. There is no verbal editorializing; the "message" resides in the visuals (and montage!) and will be decoded by the viewer in accord with his own value system.

BOY
(SHONEN)

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1969) (F)

Brechtian devices and the modern avant-garde merge in an icy, terrifying con-game based on a true incident in which a boy is forced by his parents to throw himself in the path of automobiles so they can blackmail the driver. Cars and materialism are viewed as part of a much deplored Americanization of Japan.

THE CASTING

(James Pasternak, USA, 1971)

Based on unrehearsed videotape interviews of unemployed actors answering a casting call to appear in a film involving nudity and sex, this is an example of the camera -- visible to the protagonists -- taking control, confusing natural reactions and performances in a Kafkaesque morass of hostility, need, exploitation, human vulnerability, and corruption. The "film" was never made: the videotapes, now on film, remain as a human record of how different people react to stress.

THE CRIMINAL LIFE OF ARCHIBALDO DE LA CRUZ

(Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1955)

With Bunuel, action and decor always seem realistic, but some metaphysical shock element forever breaks through the smooth surface; here, not only the severed limb (disturbing even though only a mannequin's) but the explicit likeness of mannequin and woman.

CLAIRE'S KNEE
(LE GENOU DE CLAIRE)

(Eric Rohmer, France, 1970) (F)

This film, like the rest of Rohmer's work, is insidious first because it insists on a level of civilized dialogue and intellectual subtlety practically unknown in the cinema and, more importantly, because beneath its conventional, presumed "plot", significantly minimal, there evolves a secret, second reality which constitutes a deeper meaning of the work. The film is not a mere story of summer-lit amorous entanglements, but, as in Laclos' *Dangerous Acquaintances*, the manipulation and corruption of innocents, who are still capable of feeling, by sated, world- weary cynics toying with their emotions in the guise of benevolence. The subversion of the work thus resides in its carefuly constructed ambiguity, so typical of great literature and life.

CUCKOO WALTZ

(Edward van Moerkerken, Holland, 1955)

Goose-stepping Nazis, church dignitaries, pompous officials, and patriotic groups are made to retrace their steps constantly and dance to the film's snappy music by the doctoring of newsreel materials in the laboratory. The result is a delightful debunking of law, order and conformism.

DINNER THREE MINUTES

(Jean-Paul Vroom, Netherlands, 1969)

A family eats dinner, in real time. Nothing happens; street noises and irrelevant table talk. Suddenly, the father overturns the table, with everything on it, and methodically destroys television set, piano, lamp, and the rest of the apartment.

THE DOVE

(George Coe, USA, 1971)

While gainfully preoccupied in an outhouse, Viktor Sundqvist, Nobel Prize winner, reminisces about his lost youth, his beautiful sister whom he and a girlfriend simultaneously loved too passionately, their attempt to outwit a slightly Jewish Angel of Death in a game of badminton, their nude swim in a sylvan lake and their encounters with a persistently defecating dove. The whole film is a beautifully achieved satire of Swedish films in general and Bergman's in particular. The language is fake Swedish-English-cum-Yiddish (almost every word ends with "sk") and is accompanied by full English subtitles.

DREAMS THAT MONEY CAN BUY

(Hans Richter, USA, 1948) (F)

This ambitious work of the American avant-garde consists of several "inner visions", based on ideas (and enacted) by Max Ernst, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Fernand Leger, and Alexander Calder. Their infatigable creator is the famous Dadaist painter and avant-garde film pioneer Hans Richter. The unusual scores were by Paul Bowles, Darius Milhaud, John Cage, and Edgar Varese.

EIKKA KATAPPA

(Werner Schroeter, West Germany, 1970) (F)

Magdalena Montezuma "interprets" Part IV of *Rigoletto* with spectacular results in a subversive blow at opera in which actors mouth their lines in calculated clumsiness while world-renowned vocalists suffer through the classic repertory.

A wild blow at opera is struck by a German director. In this campy film of nine parts and 56 scenes, he propels an intentionally hippie cast through marvellous spoofs of heartrending, melodramatic scenes from famed operas. The actors, in unlikely locales and dress, mouth their lines with calculated clumsiness while canned vocalists of world-repute declaim Verdi, Puccini, and Beethoven on the soundtrack.

Schroeter's accompanying program notes, in English, are typical: "Mario sings on top of a mountain of his comfortless agony." "Only Mozart can express the pains of the now son-less father."

"Thinking of her sinful, unnatural life, the fragile pop star must die on a lonesome and dirty road, sighing helplessly: Life is very precious, even now, while her younger brother comes to close her broken eyes forever."

FACES

(John Cassavetes, USA, 1968) (F)

People stripped of all defenses; an extraordinary, lacerating examination of middle-aged sexuality, in which clumsiness, lust, and failure of communication are portrayed as inevitable components. Cassavetes is the master of fictional "cinema verite" who subversively reveals us to ourselves in others. SC

GESTAPOMAN SCHMIDT
(POWSZEDNI DZIEN GESTAPOWSCA SCHMIDTA)

(Jerzy Ziarnik, Poland, 1964)

A striking, unprecedented document of the activities of a Gestapoman, as recorded in his personal snapshot album, left during the Nazi retreat from Warsaw. Of the 380 photographs of executions, tortures, and beatings, portraying himself and friends, 129 have been chosen. The narration consists entirely of the appallingly factual captions (meticulously identifying each action and name of victim) provided by Schmidt -- an unknown bureaucrat of the Third Reich, never found or identified.

HAPPINESS
(LE BONHEUR)

(Agnes Varda, France, 1966) (F)

A happy family, an eternal summer, sexual love, family picnics, all the colors and sensuality of the Impressionists; and then the wife commits suicide, a mistress takes her place, and another summer of happiness commences. A secret, subversive work of great originality.

QUEEN KELLY

(Erich Von Stroheim, USA, 1928) (F)

Only decadent Von Stroheim could have dreamed up a love affair to begin with a convent girl (Gloria Swanson) dropping her panties as she curtsies to the prince (who keeps them as a souvenir) -- a scene from yet another unfinished Von Stroheim masterpiece. Enmeshed in what he also hated, this director subverts his class and, perhaps unwittingly, reveals the connections between libertine and puritan.

HOW I BECAME A NEGRO
(WIE ICH EIN SCHWARZER WURDE)

(Roland Gall, West Germany, 1970) (F)

This clandestine film by a new German director subtly uncovers complicity, vacillation, impotence, and national character under the stress of the Nazi regime, daringly never shown or openly characterized as repressive; not a single swastika appears and Hitler's accession to power is only "heard" in military music and indistinct oratory through an open window. Despite this intentional reticence -- an accurate portrayal of how the average German may have experienced this period -- the film is drenched in the spirit of totalitarianism and reveals its corroding power by degrees.

Based on a scenario by German refugee author Oedon von Horvath, it tells of a young professor under Hitler who is attacked by parents and students for his liberal views. In a para-military school camp, the class becomes involved in the death of one of its members; the teacher is unable to prevent the implicaion of an innocent girl "drop-out" in the crime. He leaves for Africa to start a new life in a mission school; now himself an outcast -- a "Negro" -- he joins his fellow Negroes.

I LOVE YOU, I KILL YOU
(ICH LIEBE DICH, ICH TOTE DICH)

(Uwe Brandner, West Germany, 1971) (F)

A strange and laconic film set in a small German town in the near future. This almost utopian society, in which people are forever content, well- balanced, and kind to each other, is slowly revealed to be a totally controlled benevolent totalitarianism, based on drugs administered voluntarily or by force, where language no longer conveys emotion but only facts, where conformism rules supreme and where sex is no longer taboo. A young schoolteacher breaks the rules, is trapped by his homosexual lover, shot, though he turns himself over to the bored, efficient policeman for execution, becomes an outlaw himself. Through stylized acting, mysterious silences, disrupted sentences and frozen action, an atmosphere of alienation and stagnation permeates what the director ironically calls "a picture-book story of our Vaterland -- a vicious satire of the sentimental German "Heimat" films of the past.

THE JAPANESE SWORD
(NIHONTO - MONOGATARI)

(T. Asano, Japan, 1958)

This film portrays the cultural and mythological significance of the Japanese sword, its painstaking, loving fabrication, manifold varieties and uses, poetic grandeur, and sacred symbolism; it is meticulously edited and accompanied by Wagner music. A truly seditious recreation of the imperialist glory and fascist tradition of old Japan.

LAND OF SILENCE AND DARKNESS
(LAND DES SCHWEIGENS UND DER DUNKELHEIT)

(Werner Herzog, West Germany, 1971) (F)

Herzog's magisterial magnificence comes into fuller focus with this "documentary" which reveals new facets of his creative genius. If *Signs of Life* and *Even Dwarfs Started Small* are secret works, hiding his true intentions, and if the brutally sardonic, metaphysical *Fata Morgana* reveals them, this unbearably moving account of

the lives of the deaf-and-blind confirms Herzog as a mysterious new humanist of the 1970s, light-years removed from the sentimentality of the Italian neo-realists and the simplistic propaganda of untalented documentary film radicals. When a deaf-and-blind man, living in total "darkness and silence", first gingerly touches a leaf, a branch, a tree, and finally enfolds its trunk in a wordless and sensuous embrace, we are in the presence of the true suffering (and hope) of humanity and the true genius of a great filmmaker. SC

MARGALIT, THE HIGHWAY QUEEN
(Menahem Golan, Israel, 1971) (F)
Several nice Israeli boys about to gang-rape an Israeli prostitute in Sodom, of all places; a scene from a film that does much to subvert certain myths about Israel and substitutes a non-sentimental portrayal of its realities -- including its Americanization.

Perhaps this is the first Israeli film to pull the Israelis down from the pedestal of the Chosen People and make them human. In a non-sentimental yet loving manner, it portrays the adventures of a Jewish street prostitute, her very Jewish middle-aged customers, and her gang-rape by four nice Jewish boys (appropriately, in Sodom). Particularly striking is the film's capturing of the Amercanization of Israel; petrol stations, discotheques, highways, chewing gum, jazz, and little stuffed toy animals whose heads shake during particularly violent sex episodes with customers.

A very moving sequence, reminiscent of the Italian neo-realists (involving her reunion with her retarded child) and an unexpectedly unromantic end help to make this a most successful film. However, there will be no Zionist benefit parties for it.

THE MAILMAN
(POSTSCHI)

(Daryush Mehrjui, Iran, 1971) (F)

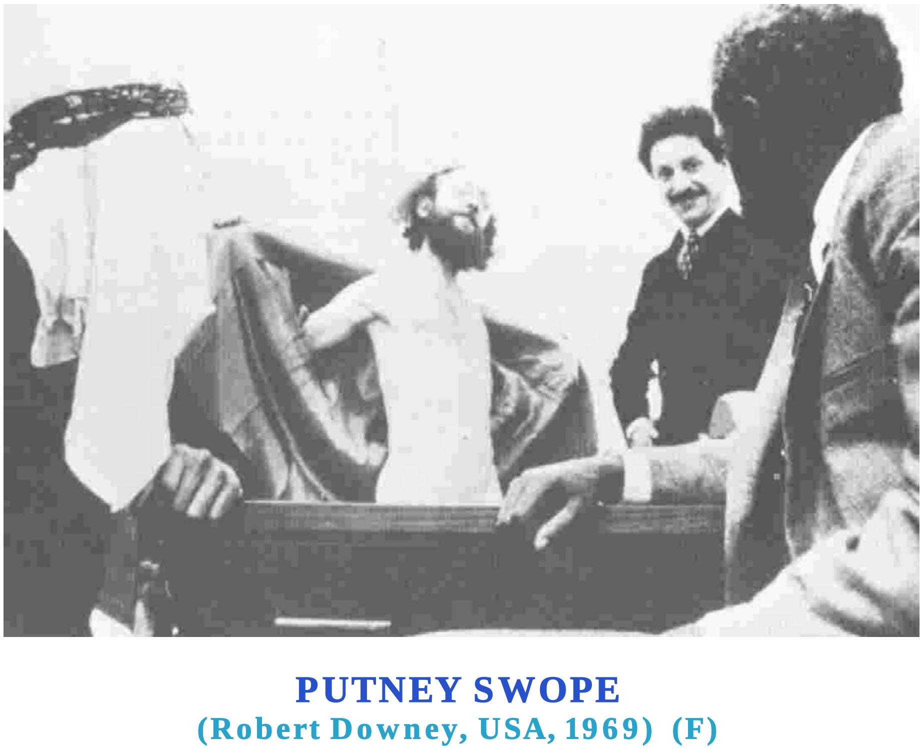
This film firnly establishes as a major talent the Iranian Mehrjui, whose successful fusing of pathos, humor, and preoccupation with the poor resembles nothing less than Chaplin or early De Sica in its ferocity. In his earlier *The Cow*, the only owner of such a precious animal in a poverty-stricken village goes insane over its loss and assumes its place; berserk, he is put into a harness, is dragged off to a nearby hospital, beaten like an animal, and finally dies the death of a beast in a mudhole. *The Mailman* is an unforgettable Wozzeck-like figure, the eternal simple-minded victim who finally rises to mistaken grandeur in a murderous gesture that leaves him braying with despair over the body of his victim. Since such films can never be popular, they are living proof of the fact that box-office returns must not be allowed to determine the life of a work of art.

MOONWALK NO. 1

(USA, 1971) (F)

A subversive image: the shadow of man on the face of another heavenly body. The film camera, in more harrowing detail than seen in less perfect TV transmissions, records its icy, death-like solitude.

This 35mm color feature, beautifully produced for NASA, is the only film so far even to touch on some philosophical and poetic aspects of what has been so tragically stereotyped as a technological feat. It contains a whole series of sights never before seen on film: the earth seen from space (a green globe, its loves, poverty, and cruelties hidden under anonymous clouds); the beige-grey, icy and dead expanses of the moon, seen upside-down from the circling rocket; the black, awe-inspiring horizon; the cataclysmic, unprecedented fury of the fiery take-off from earth. This material is juxtaposed with man's ridiculously inadequate response to the event: the barbeque-grilling, field-glass-armed, hot-dog munching throngs watching the lift-off; earthbound both physically and psychologically.



PUTNEY SWOPE

(Robert Downey, USA, 1969) (F)

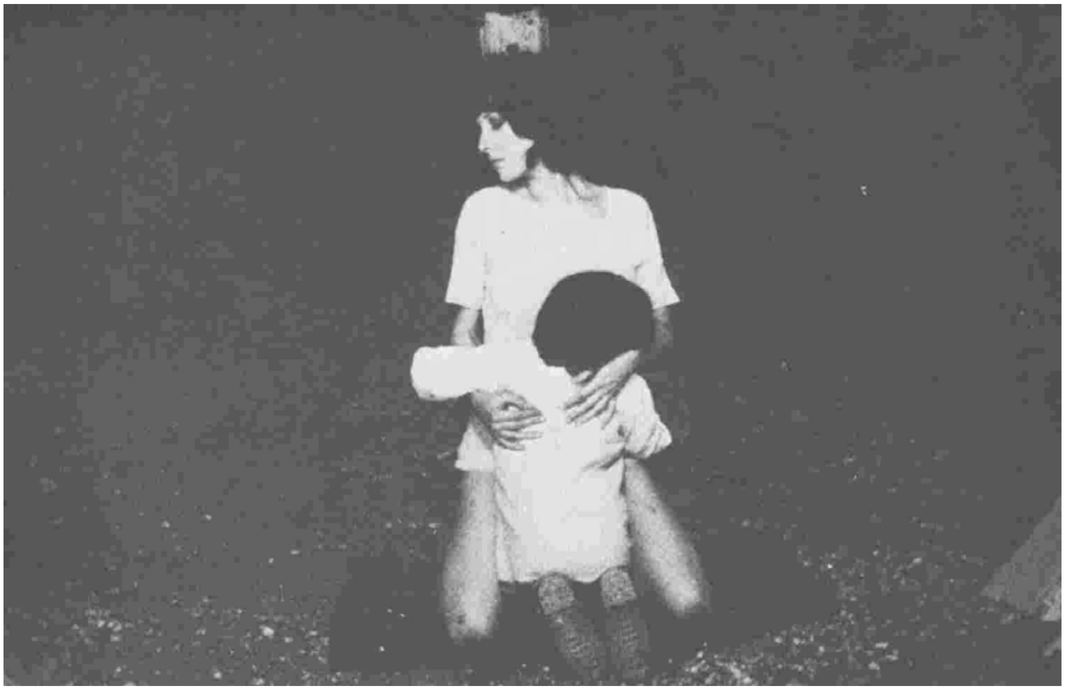
In this wild satire on Madison Avenue, nobody -- not even Blacks, Arabs, midgets, or Jews -- remains exempt from the director's corrosive, bizarre humor. Here an exhibitionist finally finds an opportunity formally to introduce himself to the boss.

Though the film is "subversive", note the compositional concession to the actor. SC

PARIS BELONGS TO US (PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT)

(Jacques Rivette, France, 1958/60)

This enigmatic, feature-length "thriller" -- abrupt, elliptic, paranoid -- enmeshes suspects, victims, and seekers alike in a shadowy mystery of murder and suicide, possibly linked to a secret worldwide conspiracy. The film's hallucinatory power and ideological preoccupations have been widely compared to Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad*. "The fruit of an astonishing persistence over several years to bring to the screen a personal vision of the world today; a universe of anguished confusion and conspiracy. It is the fusion of poetic vision and realist impression which makes it a film of foremost importance to us." -- Claude Chabrol, Jacques Demy, Jean Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jean-Pierre Melville, Alain Resnais, Francois Truffaut, Agnes Varda.



THE REVEALER (LE REVELATEUR)

(Phillippe Garrel, France, 1968) (F)

Hallucinatory evocation of a child's real (or imagined) memories. Here the child is between the mother's legs in foetal or almost coital position, his shortness and pathetically

tilted head sadly hinting at insufficiency; the mother, loving yet remote (her head turned the opposite way), clasps him in reserved embrace. The post evokes a cross or place of punishment.

With almost ten features and shorts to his name, Garrel is one of the most unknown important new directors; like Werner Herzog, he is too original and self-willed to become popular. Overpowering in its profound silence, this seems to be his masterpiece. It is a hallucinatory, painful story of a man, a woman, and their child, played in a timeless, hermetic universe of country roads at night, the eternal, ever-present parental bed, claustrophobic interiors, and a barrage of psycho-analytical revelations and mysteries, nightmarishly seen or imagined by the child. One of the few psychologically valid visualizations of a child's tortured Oedipal fantasies ever created on film, *The Revealer* subverts by activating the spectator's own troubled subconscious. The poetry and profound mystery of the images, the constant visual shocks and revelations mark Garrel as a major new talent of the international cinema.

SALESMAN

(David and Albert Maysles, USA, 1969) (F)

However muted, this cinema verite study of itinerant Bible salesmen doing their thing for God and the company is an inevitable indictment of the commercialization of religion. Proletarians and lower middle-class alike are cajoled into long-term contracts, special bindings, and tie-in deals, while their fears, superstitions, anxieties, and poignant attempts somehow to take out a life insurance with God are carefully orchestrated by cold-blooded and petty mercenaries. Some of the stifling realities of Middle America have never before been so mercilessly documented. SC

THE SCANDALOUS ADVENTURES OF BURAIKAN

(Masahiro Shinoda, Japan, 1970) (F)

Magically transfigured by the well-known avant-garde playwright Shuji Terayama from a Kabuki play, this densely textured, sprawling tapestry of "a time of repression, anarchy, hedonism and decadence" offers a sophisticated equivalent of a flamboyant, picaresque cartoon strip serial, its studied "vulgarity" wedded to a profoundly modern ironic pessimism. The philosophical tone is set by a barker in the Edo theatrical district: "Hell is here on Earth.

The Wheel of Fortune Turns Forever." The time is the 1940s, the last feudal period of Japan, when Lord Mizuno despotically attempts to reform the city and return it to law and order by banning amusements, prostitutes, fireworks, and gambling. The flamboyant action, broad acting, garish make-up and decor are melodramatic and one-dimensional, as befits a cartoon, but round the edges hovers a very contemporary *Weltschmerz*, intimations of a hostile universe dominated by chance, with innocence at the mercy of evil, murderous violence close to the glittering surface and rogues (*buraikans*) in every corner.

In a climactic confrontation, the despotic reform movement is attacked by its victims -- actors, hairdressers, loafers, "waitresses", and rogues, reminiscent of the Brechtian Lumpenproletariat in Eisenstein's *Strike* -- who burn the city's guard houses, set off (forbidden) fireworks, and proclaim "the beginning of the eternal festival." The *buraikan* informs Lord Mizuno that his day is over, but is coolly told that no riot can ever overthrow power, since it is eternal and will always be replaced. The *buraikan*, to prove the existence of the revolt, flings open a window to show the lord the forbidden fireworks, but realizes, transfixed, that they are unaccompanied by sound, a dream rather than a reality. In an apocalyptic finale (to Shinoda, the equivalent of the revolutionary students' riots of our day), the rebellion is crushed amidst Bosch-like images of death, hangings, silent fires, and murder, with a man and a woman indifferently coupling in a burning, devastated house-front, while a would-be actor casually notes that someone seems to be attempting to change the world. The last image is that over a coffin-maker who, as throughout the film, diligently hammers away at his coffins, now busier than ever.

THE PATH

(Richard Myers, USA, 1961)

Light as the symbol of the ineffable. The "plot" of this subjective recreation of a dream seems to concern a mysterious journey; the spectator, however, is visually directed toward forms and substances rather than to the protagonists by a film-maker who is a master of visionary cinema.

TALES OF KUBELKIND (GESCHICHTEN VOM KUBELKIND)

(Ula Stoeckl and Edgar Reitz, West Germany, 1970) (F)

In form and content possibly the most original German avant-garde work of the seventies, this film now runs over three hours and consists of 26 stories about Kubelkind (garbage-can-child, a Viennese oath), each from one to thirty minutes in length and strung together very loosely. An eventual ten hour film is envisaged. Kubelkind -- a nubile young lady

emerging fully-grown from a garbage can into which an unwanted baby had just been thrown -- is an eternal misfit who effectively disrupts bourgeois society. Chapter headings convey the film's flavor. "When Kubelkind wants it, some men drop their pants quickly." Something about the ability of society to forgive, to forget, and to revenge." "Kubelkind experiences an educational attempt at the hands of a priest." "Kubelkind becomes acquainted with a lord and is hanged." "Kubelkind believes in installment buying and must therefore jump from a four-story building while singing a sad song." In one scene, she succeeds in persuading her lover to eat various parts of his body to prove his love; in another, she is sadistically killed by a "Hurenmorder" (Whore-murderer), played with full commitment and gusto by Werner Herzog, the director of *Fata Morgana* and *Even Dwarfs Started Small*. The film is a bawdy, cruel, sardonic work which manages to spoof practically every genre of filmmaking -- gangster, sex, vampire, science fiction, and family films.

TITICUT FOLLIES

(Frederick Wiseman, USA, 1967) (F)

Prisons and mental institutions, where recalcitrant or ill-fitting citizens are put out of sight, are the dirty secrets of civilized society. As they are owned and controlled by precisely those who wish to keep them secret, and are also confined to specific, enclosed spaces, filmmakers are easily kept out. Wiseman's achievement in creating this unique film document is therefore all the more impressive: it is a major work of subversive cinema and a searing indictment -- without editorializing narration -- of the "system". Wiseman (and his extraordinary cameraman-anthropologist John Marshall) officially gained entrance to a state hospital for the criminally insane, where the film was shot, and obtained the cooperation of its psychiatrists, guards, and social workers. Massachusetts, however, subsequently obtained an injunction preventing the film's exhibition, thereby keeping the secret.

This is a gallery of horrors, a reflection of man's infinite capacity to dehumanize his fellow beings. Broken men, retarded, catatonic, schizophrenic, toothless -- many incarcerated for life -- vegetate in empty cells, bare of furniture, utensils, toilets, or beds. They are incontinent, they masturbate, babble, put on a horrifying annual variety show (the "Titicut Follies"), beat against the bars in rage, and scream. They stand on their heads for minutes on end while chanting self-invented hymns, or are force-fed through the nose while a Dr. Strangelove psychiatrist himself (!) pours liquid down the stomach tube. They are taunted or patronized, drink their own dirty bathwater while in the tub (smilingly calling it champagne), and die, ignonimously, their bodies shaved before burial and cotton-wool stuffed into their eyes. The camera flinches from nothing; here

it is, it says, and since you are not doing anything about eliminating this, at least have the courage to watch. SC

FOR MORE ABOUT THIS FILM, CLICK HERE

FATA MORGANA

(Werner Herzog, West Germany, 1970) (F)

A sardonic, melancholic comment on man in the universe, perversely (and accurately) set in primitive Africa; for here technology is once again embraced and absorbed by nature. The presence of a decaying aeroplane in a desert is surrealist in its implications, matching a host of other hallucinatory images in this neglected masterpiece. SC

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

THE BED
(James Broughton, USA, 1967)
Sacrilege remains attractive as long as God is still considered a worthy opponent. The spatially very specific juxtaposition of sex image and the accoutrements of organized religion provokes the usual tension of guilty delight at the viewing of a forbidden image.

THE POWER OF THE VISUAL TABOO

To the extent that there still exist forbidden images, when have not advanced beyond the stage of pre-history. For the acceptance of several understandable misconceptions on the

part of early man that appear positively embarrassing when carried over into the 20th century: the notion that representation is identical with reality, that particular objects or acts have magical powers, and that these involve the punishment of those who "transgress" by touching, taking, or portraying them.

The injunction not to look or touch is as old as man. Its determination is a prerogative of Gods, kings, and priests -- the "haves" wishing to protect their own. They establish its validity for the have-nots by means of law-enforcing agents and medicine men, feeding on earlier animistic beliefs and the ignorance of men beset by alien and inexplicable forces. The designation of taboo foods, objects, idols, acts, and persons establishes a system of rigidly enforced rules of order and social control: for the taboo object is thought to be "contagious", its pollution inevitably transmitted to the violator.

The fear of contagion is also a fear of temptation. The tabooed object or act always embodies within itself loathing and attraction, the "awful as well as the awesome" and its "holy dread" (Freud) will be the stronger, the more desired the object.

> **The differentiation of the two attitudes is never perfectly accomplished even in the higher religions, for always some ambiguity remains as to what is fearsome because diabolic and what is fearsome because divine. The "unclean thing" and the "clean thing" alike possess power, whether this be the power to blast or the power to bless. (1)**

Woman and her reproductive cycle are filled with taboos. Menstruation and pregnancy are viewed as unclean in many tribes and systems of religion. Even stronger are taboos on sex itself, the most fundamental, most powerfully desired, and hence most dangerous act of human existence.

> **Many primitive people display a lively fear of the consequences of sexual intercourse either for themselves or for others. Mystic dangerousness invests the organs of generation; they are a seat of occult power. Because a woman is so often regarded as temporarily or permanently unclean, contact with her in the intimacy of the sex embrace would naturally be considered to involve pollution, sometimes for the man alone, sometimes for the woman as well. Such an idea combines readilywith the further notion that the physical uncleanliness resulting from the discharge of fluids by both parties, at the completion of cohabitation, becomes a source of ritual uncleanness. (2)**

The Judeo-Christian concept of original sin is a qualitative

extension of these early tendencies, an "elaboration" of a taboo by means of a legend. But nudity and exposure of sex organs cause neither shame nor surprise in primitive society: it would require special education, Rene Guyon notes, to produce "that apparently natural and spontaneous horror which Western people experience when they see the naked body." (3)

> **The mere fact that certain organs are related to certain functions surely affords no ground for indignation or disgust ... neither physiology, psychology nor logic can provide the philosopher with satisfactory reasons for excommunicating a few particular muscles and sensory organs ... it is only through sex prohibitions themselves that a special value comes to be placed upon the exhibition of sexual organs. (4)**

As the system of taboo was superseded by organized religion (latter-day magic), it reappeared in the new guise of ethical and moral imperatives, so carefully embedded in the collective unconscious as to give them the legitimacy of natural laws.

Webster correctly points out that these imperatives include the inviolability of marrige, of private property, law and order, and the establishment itself.

Because the distinction between "looking" and "participating" was not defined among primitive men as it is now and pictorial representation less important, the taboo of "looking" has assumed greater importance in our time. And if primitive people even today avoid being photographed in the belief that part of the spirit is removed at the instant a picture is "taken", (5) we, too, by becoming "self-conscious", pay subconscious tribute to the "magical" propenseties of the photograph.

it is the "fixing" of a concrete moment of time that helps evoke this twinge of anxiety, by investing the image of an event with a power the event itself does not possess: permanence.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE
(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1971)
The most dangerous object known to the censor because the most desirable, here boldly multiplied in several symbolic approximations and stylized under a spectral light. The camera angle reinforces the aggressive, lethal character of the weapon; and this is how it is used. For the commercial cinema, even an artificial phallus is a step forward. SC

THE VISUAL TABOO IN FILM

However irrational, the taboo (or even the "frowned-upon") image reflects subconscious realities still operative in men. This can be felt in the pronounced physiological and emotional reactions of any movie audience, subject only to individual variations of intensity or duration. We refer here not to applause or hisses; more importantly, viewers will, at given moments, flinch from what occurs on the screen -- not merely by turning away (this would be sufficient) but by irrationally shielding their faces; they will call out in anger or approbation, burst into tears, fall into deep silence, vomit, faint, or leave the theatre. Many must avert their glance when the camera peers down from high

buildings; or cry out in fear when a mountain climber suddenly loses his grip. However noisy, they are instantly quieted by sex scenes, the more direct the portrayal, the more pervasive their silence. "First" attendees of sexually explicit films react (in direct proportion to how repressed they are) with disgust, defensive laughter, or haughty boredom; but they soon fall silent and retreat into private reverie with their less complicated fellow-viewers. Stimulil so strong that they eventuate in actual movement or physiological response (such as vomiting or fainting) do not (except for tears) occur in reading or listening; it's the palpable "actuality" of the image, its concrete revelation of the previously hidden, feared, or desired, the lessened "distance" between viewer and simulated reality that is the source of its power: "In dealing with events or behavior, the movies can sweep away the ordinary technical barriers -- words, pictorial stillness, diminution -- that stand between the viewer and physical reality depicted by the printed media." (6) Thus when *I Am Curious - Yellow* was under litigation in several dozen American cities and states for obscenity, its full script was on sale nationally as a paperback; and sexually explicit "hardcore" books are now available at American drugstores while photographs detailing identical acts are not.

The shock inevitably connected with the portrayal of a taboo object or act is significantly magnified in the case of film. The image itself is huge, setting up immediate tension with the viewer. It moves in bright space against a totally black background. It can be introduced in the most instantaneous, intentionally frightening or disruptive fashion by means of editing, zooms, rapid pans, special effects, occurring singly, or even more potently, in combination.

Particularly traumatic are sudden and unexpected transitions from innocuous to taboo images. For we attend ordinary "entertainment" films without fear of risk, secure in the fore-knowledge that we shall participate in an illusion; it may look like reality but is not. When confronted by visual taboos, however -- such as real sex or death -- we immediately feel an element of risk and primordial danger, as if the image could touch, indeed, engulf us within its own reality. It is in these supreme moments of cinema that we should sense our affinity with primitive man not yet fully able to distinguish between reality and image: for both in flinching from or in reverential complicity with the taboo image, we elevate a reflection of moving light patterns to the status of truth.

Film seems to be the medium most capable of utilizing reality for purposes of art or record, a characteristic of fundamental importance. In the other arts, even so-called "true events" must be fabricated: a biography of a famous personality, however "documentary" in intent, remains a recreation at the hands of an artist or a hack. But the film biography of this same man can draw on actual film records of his life, however subsequently transmuted by montage into truth or falsehood. Similarly, cinema enables us to witness the horror and secret tickle of real death or murder,

torture and executions, the drama of birth, and, lately, real sex.

In the case of actual death before the camera, we are never confronted by the usual philosophical "problem" of cinema verite of whether the filmmaker's presence does or does not change the reality of the event; the dying man is either unaware of the camera or no longer cares to maintain his customary defense patterns for a posterity of which he will not be part.

The case of sex is more complicated, for despite the hundreds of recent "hardcore" films, we do not see completely documentary sex, unless one-way mirrors are used which the protagonists are unaware of. Today's sex films, whether soft- or hard-core, are "acted", despite the change from "simulated" to "real" sex (complete with orgasm and ejaculation). It is only to the extent that sexual passion becomes dominant and the initial monetary or exhibitionist impulses of the "actors" recede that the film comes closer to recording an actual sex act in which the protagonists forget camera and audience; dialectially, this "forgetfulness" is intuitively grasped by the audience, resulting in more pronounced arousal.

Conversely, where the taboo image appears as part of a staged event, its impact on the viewer is far weaker. Only rarely (in films such as *Diabolique* or *Psycho*) does fictional recreation reach the intensity of the true taboo.

Certain taboo images do not appear on screen either because they have gone out of style or because they are so threatening as to have been banished from the subconscious. "Suggestive" situations in old Hollywood films today strike us as merely archaic; and even *I Am Curious - Blue* (part II of *I am Curious - Yellow*) was no longer a hit, precisely because *Yellow*, by providing the thin end of the wedge, had immediately been outstripped. The awesome documentary shots of A-bomb explosions -- always leading to complete audience silence -- have disappeared from the screens of the world, indicating that the central reality of our era has been pushed into the collection unconscious.

But the primitive taboo, however irrational, remains with us; its persistence into the present is frightening to behold. As we watch scenes of death, intercourse, or birth in reverential abandon, our utter silence is witness to the thrilling guilt of the voyeur / transgressor (to see what one has no right to see), coupled with fear of punishment. How delicious when it does not come and the forbidden act or image can continue to be viewed! It is only to the extent that these forbidden sights will become more common in cinema that we shall begin to accept them for what they are: climactic moments of life without doubt, but only part of it.

The attack on the visual taboo and its elimination by open, unhindered display is profoundly subversive, for it strikes at prevailing morality and religion and thereby at law and order itself. It calls into question the concept of eternal values and rudely uncovered their historicity. It proclaims the validity of sensuality and lust as legitimate human prerogatives. It reveals that what state authority proclaims as harmful may in fact be beneficial. It brings birth and death, our first and last mysteries, into the arena of human discourse and eases their acceptance. It fosters rational attitudes which fundamentally conflict with atavistic superstitions. It demystifies, organs, and excretions. It does not tolerate man as a sinner, but accepts him and his acts in their entirety.

To those who abolish taboos, "nothing human is alien", as they marvel at the multiplicity of human endeavor and the diversity of an enterprise limited only by generic structure and cosmic environment.

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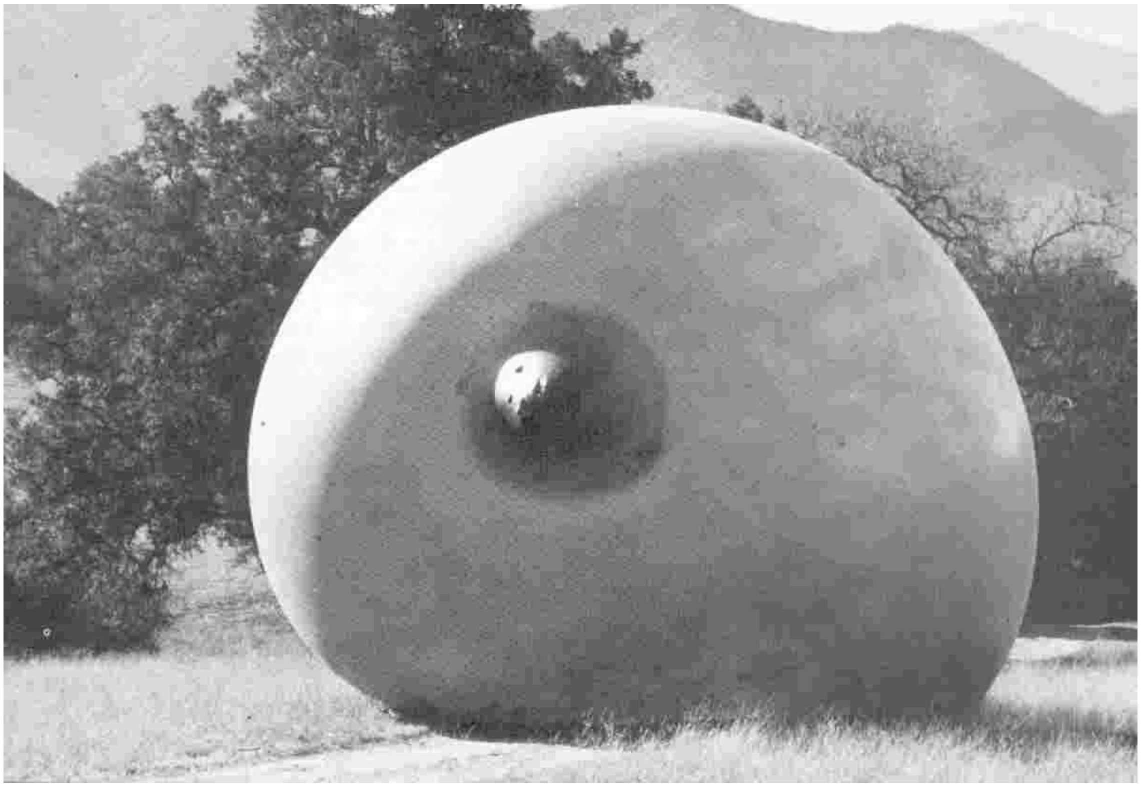
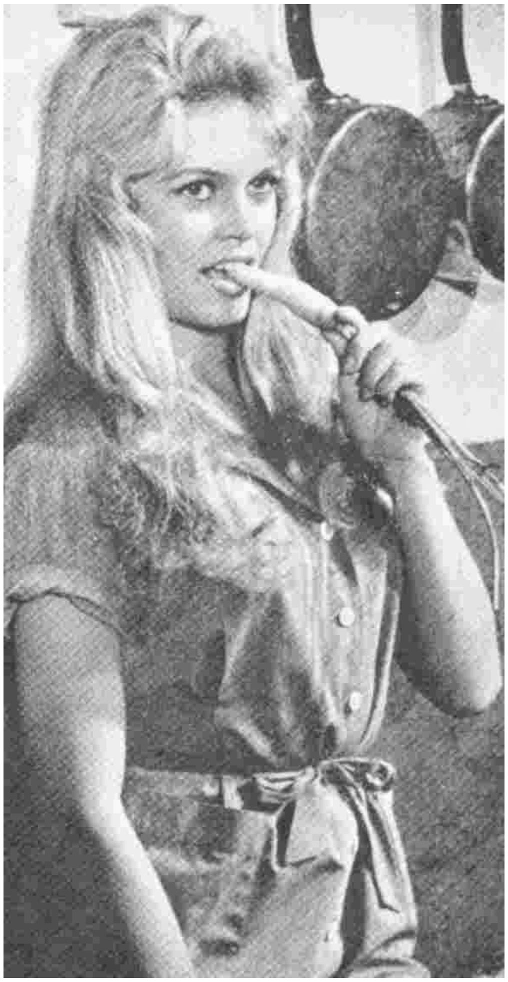
FILMS



EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX, BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

(Woody Allen, USA, 1972) (F)

Familiar objects and locale -- unfamiliar juxtapositions and disproportionate size. A monster breast scouring the countryside provides an example of the surrealist object attack a visual taboo. Since no threat is implied, however, the visual shock induces laughter instead of fright.



AND GOD CREATED WOMAN
(ET DIEU CREA LA FEMME)

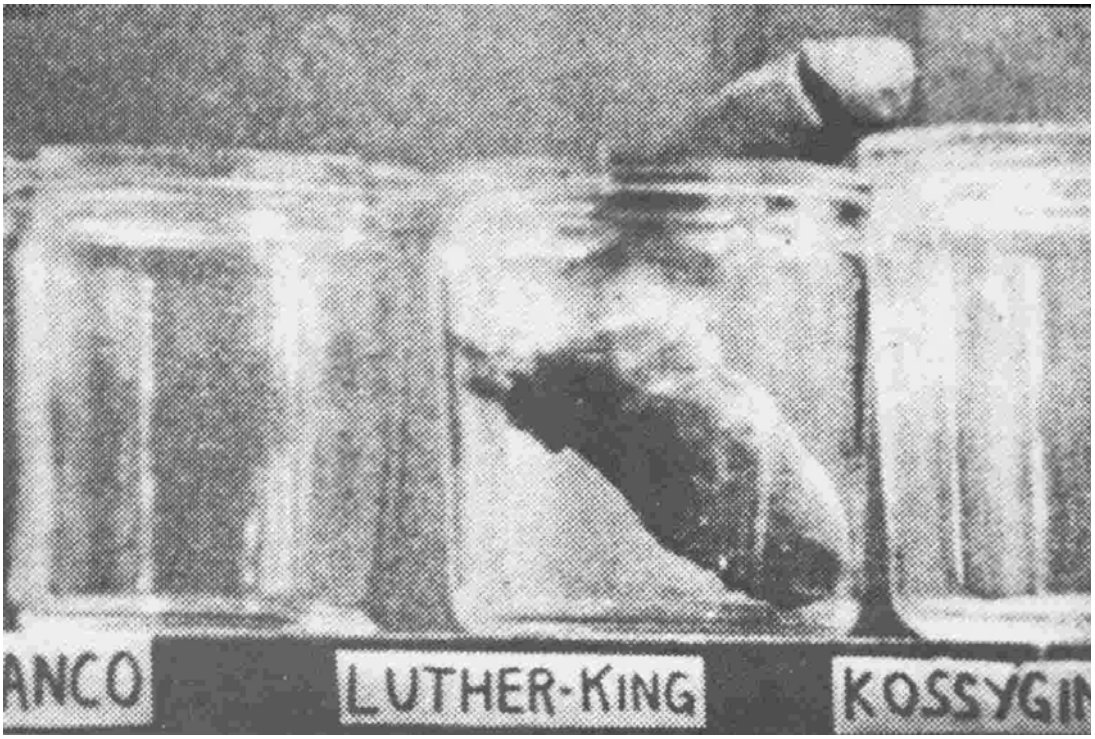
(Roger Vadim, France, 1956) (F)

Bardot as a vegetarian, or -- how easy it is to get around the censor. In a medium as taboo-ridden as the cinema, this disguise combines box-office appeal with safety; depending on the director's intent, it may represent either titillation or erotic realism.

EVENTS

(Fred Baker, USA, 1970)

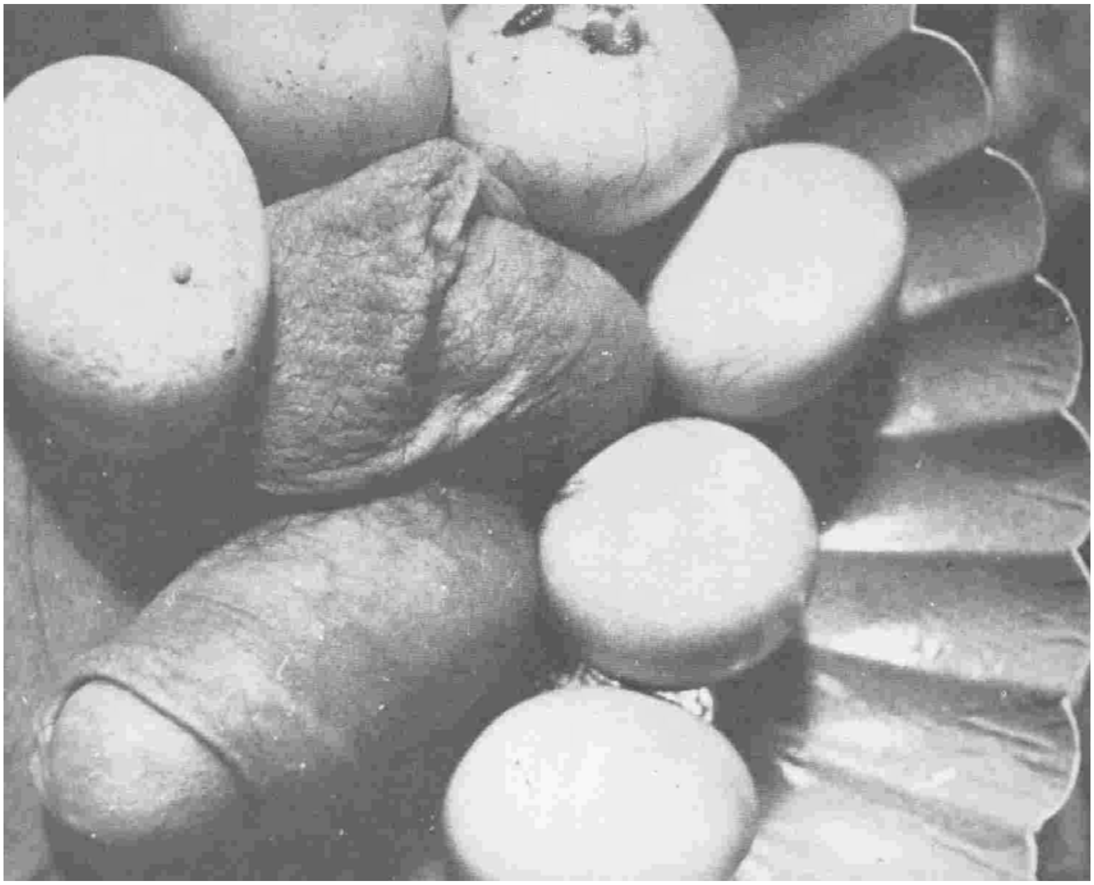
The most dangerous image known to man. Though it portrays the most universal, most fundamental, most desired human act, it must not be shown (either in its joining of bodies or coupling of organs), be it because sex is (still) considered sinful or because of an atavistic fear that the act will "spring" from the screen and invade the audience with its heavenly power. As long as this image is forbidden, its presentation will be a liberating act.



THE BLOODTHIRSTY FAIRY

(Roland Lethem, Belgium, 1968)

The subversive always attempts to go a steo further even than his most ardent followers. Those who accept visual portrayals of the penis, may well balk at this particular combination -- a sample of the private collection of an anarchist fairy who specializes in castration of leaders of all types. Questions of "limits", "good taste", and even "political advisability" will suddenly arise -- merely indicating that yet another taboo is being uncovered.



MAMA AND PAPA
(MAMA UND PAPA)
(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1963/69)
The unexpected combination of sexual taboo and food provokes both shock and laughter, not merely because of the visual pun but because organs are not often presented to us in "tasteful" display for purposes of eating. SC

ORDINARY FASCISM

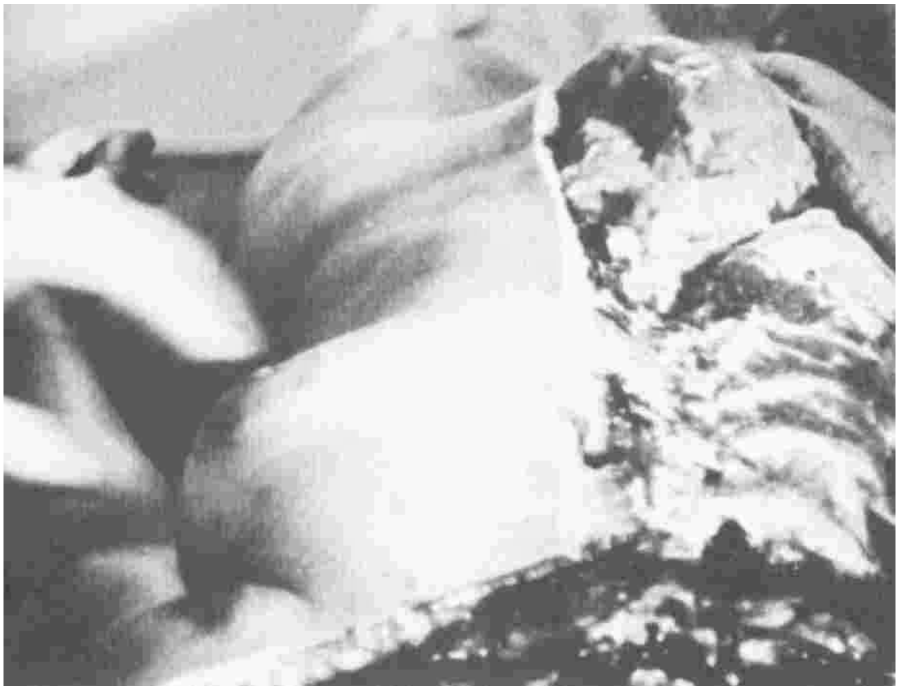
(Mikhail Romm, USSR, 1965)

A forever unknown civilian in the East
about to be axed by a German soldier.
The portrayal of real death in so concrete
a medium as cinema causes fright and
profound introspection as we watch
the true end of another human being.

OTMAR BAUER PRESENTS

(Otmar Bauer, West Germany, 1970?)

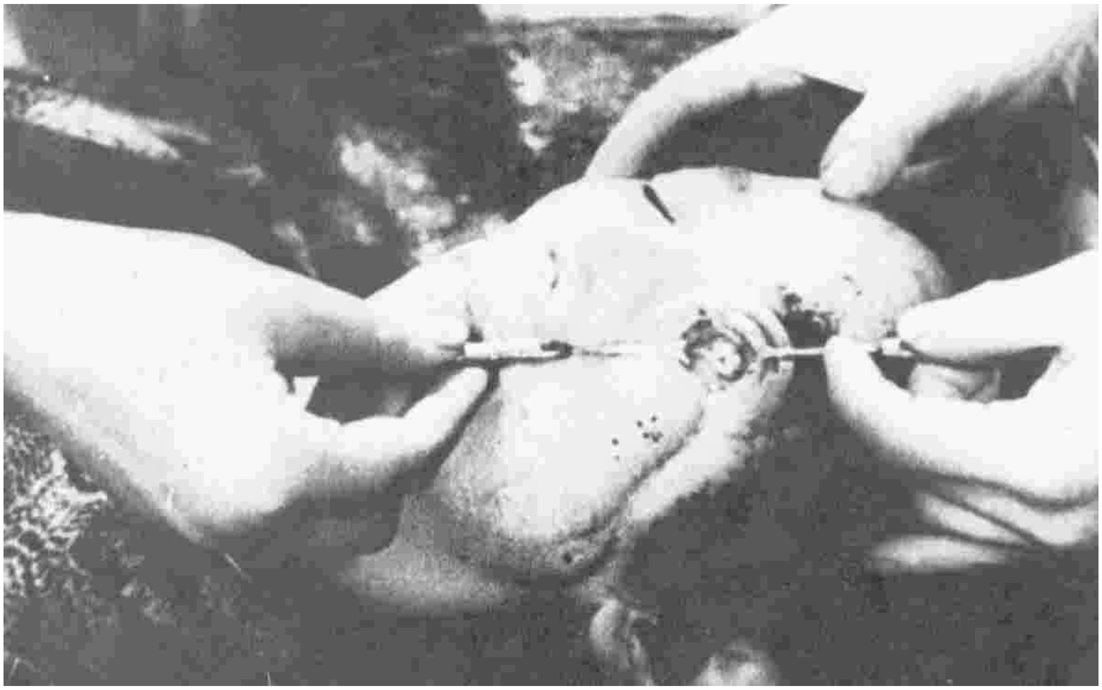
The act of vomiting. All bodily secretions (feces, urine, sperm, and menstrual flow) are considered taboo in terms of visual portrayal, because (protestations to the contrary) we remain chained to notions of the body's uncleanliness and animality. The more universal the event, the less viewable it is.



THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1972)

The subconsciously hoped-for inviolability of bodily surfaces -- the more so, perhaps, if female -- is brutally attacked by dissection. SC



HIROSHIMA

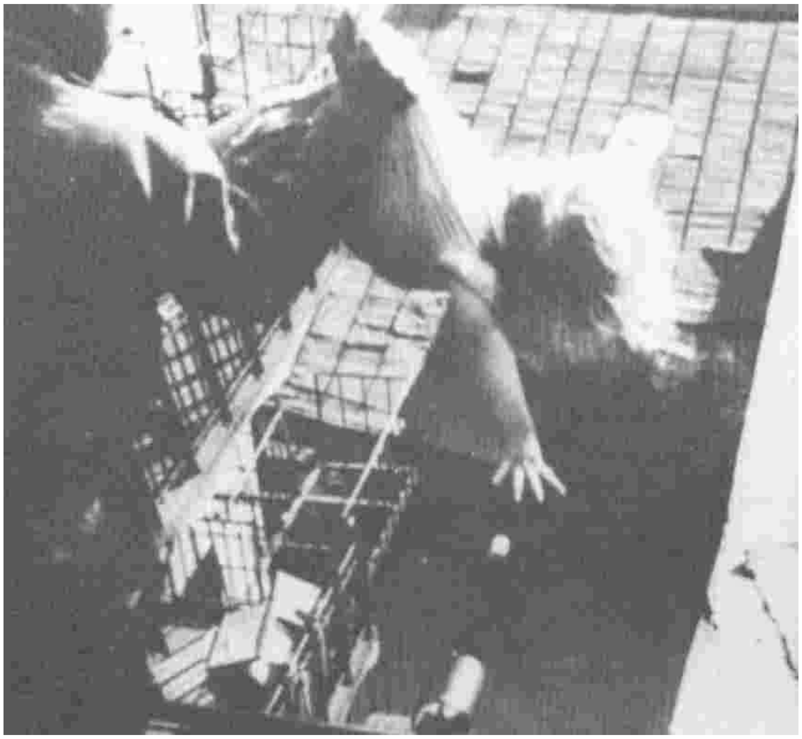
(M. Ogasawara and Y. Matsukawa, Japan, 1970)

The eye of a Hiroshima victim, forced open to reveal the damage. Man's psychological threshold is so low that it has easier to perpetrate such deeds than to show them on a screen. The American government (aware that it had done something it was best to hide) helped by banning all such footage until recently.

VAMPYR

(Carl Theodor Dreyer, Germany/France, 1931)

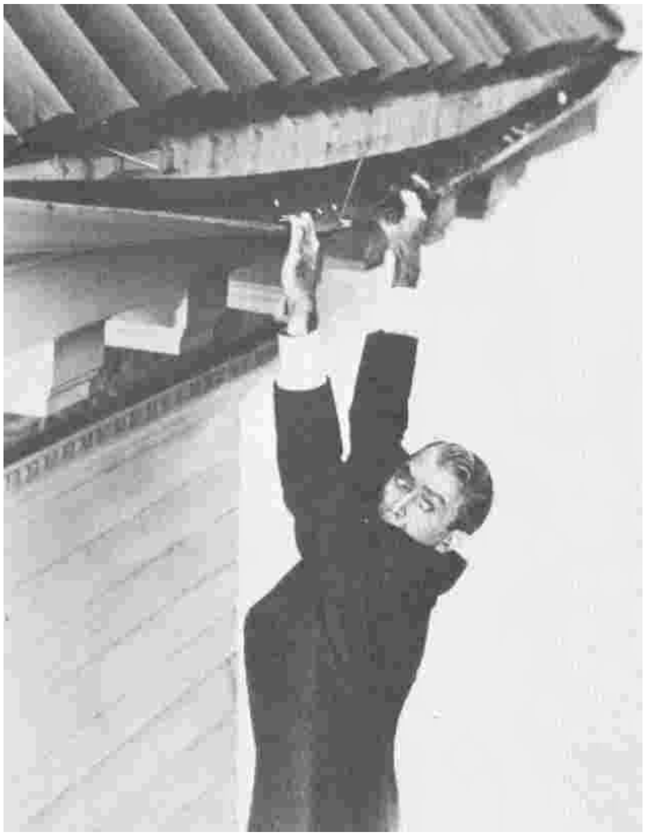
Possibly the most extraordinary fictional portrayal of the experience of death occurs in this hallucinatory film. The hero (dead, but with eyes wide open) finds himself in his coffin; through a window cut in the lid, he -- and we -- see above us the vampire and her evil helper (screwing the coffin closed) and then sky, trees, and buildings on the way to his (our) burial. SC



STRIKE

(Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1924)

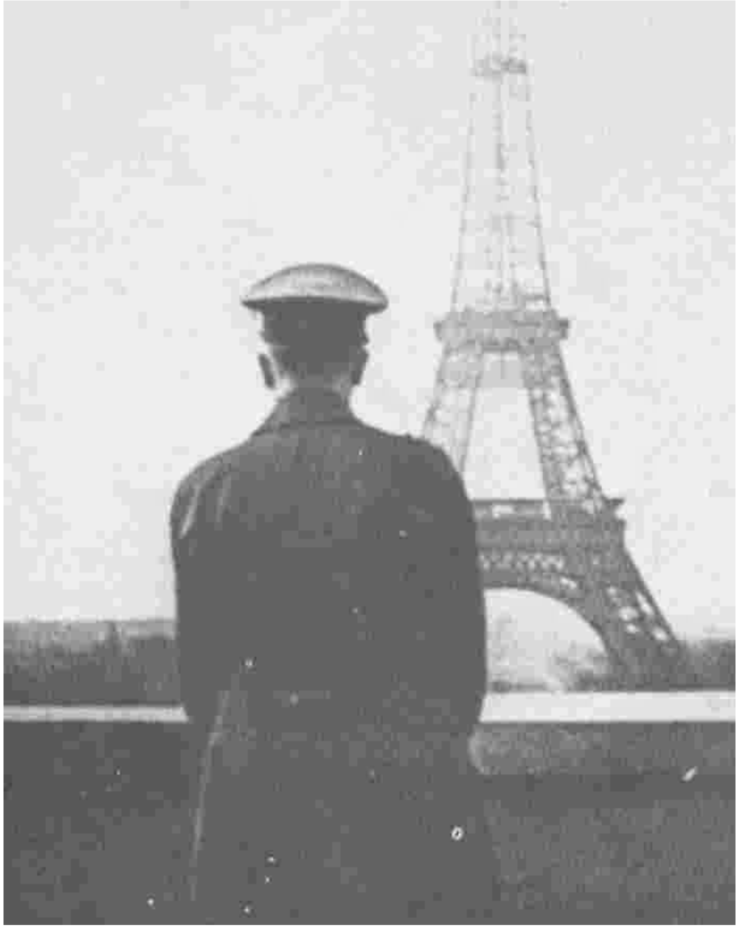
The fear of being thrown: Eisenstein's shot centers on an arm an a hand, recognized as those of a child at the precise instant at which it also dawns upon the harrowed viewer that the child may be thrown to its death. Within the same second, this is what happens. The violation of a visual taboo (by the Tsarist militia) serves political purposes.



VERTIGO

(Alfred Hitchcock, USA, 1958)

The fear of falling: a moment of atavistic, deathly fright, as the hero, his support weakening, may lose his grip. Our unease -- even when we know it is make-believe -- centers on the man's eyes staring at death; the entire film pivots on this universal, primitive anxiety.



UFA NEWSREEL
(Germany, 1940)
Hitler entering Paris in 1939. This "forbidden" image caused profound shock when first released. The unexpected and ominous juxtaposition of the two clashing symbols confirmed the incursion of barbarism into the heartland of Western civilization. Today it hints at the relativity of the visual taboo (a new generation can no longer "read" Hitler solely from his back) and at the solidity of structures as against men.

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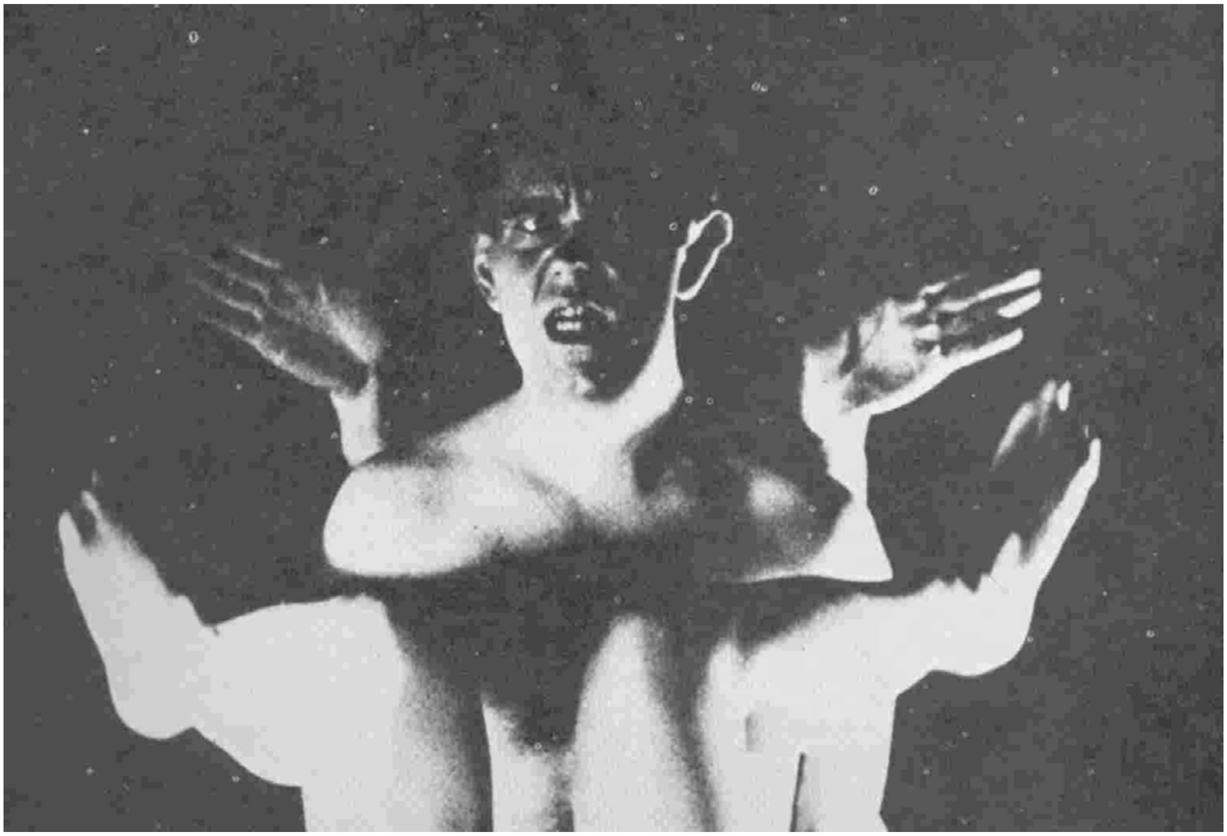


HALLUCINATIONS

(Peter Weiss, Sweden, 1952)

The famed author of *Marat-Sade*, in one of his early avant-garde films, shows twelve erotic and subconscious tableaux envisioned in the twilight between waking and sleeping. The macabre action denotes sex, yet not quite; the angle of viewing seems "wrong", the scowling intensity denoting orgasm -- or anger.

THE ATTACK ON PURITANISM: NUDITY

Within the last twenty years, international cinema has indecisively, yet irrevocably moved from prohibition to permissiveness as regards nudity,

with censors everywhere thrown into disarrayby changing mores and unorthodox court rulings. What used tobe confined to exploitation and underground films has now entered the mainstream of commercial production, though full frontal nudity is still rare. Most puritanical are the supposedly revolutionary societies (Russia, China, and their satellites), closely followed by nationalist leftist or totalitarian rightistmovements, each afraid of the body for its own reasons,while more liberal attitudes prevail in Yugoslavia,England, America, and Scandinavia.

The classic court attitude towards the subject is perhaps best represented by the New York State censorship decision,which instructed its staff as follows: "In the scene, in whichthe girl is tortured while hanging by her hands, eliminate all views of her with breasts exposed." (1) This "instruction" clearly considers nudity to be more dangerous than violence; or, as Lenny Bruce the great and tragic social satirist observed, Americans cannot stand the sight of naked bodies unless they are mutilated.

Since no one ever dared assume that it would be possible to show sex organs, breasts have always been the censor'smain concern. Their display used to be confined todocumentaries of Africa. While the censors, by allowing this, expressed their patronizing racialism (black breasts may be stared at, but not white ones), schoolboys flocked to such films *en masse,* just as each year they persuaded their (erroneously delighted) parents to re-subscribe to the *National Geographic* magazine, with its full-color native breasts. But even such photographs and films failed to show primary sex organs and in the 1950s, the American Museum of Natural History documentary *Latuko* was banned, since its natives unforgivably omitted loincloths altogether, with predictably dire results.

The artificiality of the visual taboo is best exemplified in the astonishing case of the missing pubic hair.Until less than ten years ago, it was impossible to reveal the existence of pubic hair in cinema. Frontal views were avoided or, where greedily attempted, simultaneously "shielded" from view. (In the girlie magazines, pubic areas were carefully retouched, creating strangely antiseptic spaces.) In America, laboratories refused to develop even 8-mm nudehome movie footage. In the last decade, however, courtdecisions in Denmark and America have suddenly introduced pubic hair to the cinema, leading so far neither to anarchy nor a collapse of the nation's moral fiber. Though pubic hair remains rare (and therefore still titillating) in commercial cinema, the 1972 *Playboy* decision finally to admit it to its pages (years after the nudist magazines) augurs ill for this taboo.

The previous total ban on nudity and its sudden availability proves once and for all the transitory, arbitrary nature of what conformists consider unalterable facts of life. What induces censors to withhold such materials is also their realization that the abolition of a taboo leads to its devaluation and ultimate acceptance as "normal", no longer either threatening

or stimulating; censors, after all, have a vested interest in sin.

The further erosion of the taboo on nudity, however, was in its various stages as predictable as it was inevitable. In the 50s and 60s, the cinema inched towards equalnudity of both sexes (Antonioni, Bergman, Godard,*The Graduate*, *Romeo and Juliet*). Sex organs, still too threatening, were not shown, the taboo being so deeply embedded as to make them appear distasteful even to sexual progressives (Freud noted that secondary sexual characteristics were universally accepted as more arousing). It was only in the late 60s -- again in America and Scandinavia -- that "beaver" films were beginning to be publicly shown; crudely vulgar film records of writhing nude females spreading their legs for a close-up investigation. In a few isolated instances, the male organ made its appearance, inevitably flaccid, even in the most tantalyzing circumstances, for legal rather than medical reasons.

Along the way, there were amusing detours: extraneous nude footage added to films by businessmen eager to boost box-office returns (such as the unexpected appearanceof a second nude girl, undressing in the bushes withHedy Lamarr in *Ecstasy*); the antiseptic, carefully retouched nudist films; the sudden popularity of films about certain painters -- the nudity validated as art and the artist serving as licensed voyeur. All of these transformed nudity, Randall ironically noted, into "the most extensively expounded idea in motion pictures". (2) Later, even these "genuine" nudist films were replace by commercial fakes, in which gorgeous nude starlets in gleaming Hollywood swimming pools had replaced the matrons with pendulous breasts playing tennis on broken-down nudist farms.

The commercial cinema often continues fraudulently to use nudity for titillation; strategic areas are blocked by props and camera angles or by framelines and such careful posingthat nudity is both pretended and absent. The director is thus able at the same time to arouse the viewer and also obtain censorship clearance. The American *Owl and the Pussycat* (1971)is a recent example.

Where full frontal nudity infrequently appears in commercial films (such as *Five Easy Pieces*, *The Last Picture Show*, *Last Tango in Paris*) it is generally confined to women, probably on the theory that as regards primary sex organs,there is less to see. This subtle "male chauvanism" continues to prevent the appearance of the penis, the most threatening object known to the censors. If ever a fleeting glance of it is permitted, it is either limited to a child (it's smaller and not yet sexually operative) or to some activity not even indirectly related to its usual functions.

The full acceptance of the nude human body and its organs is unquestionably an achievement of the avant-garde, reflecting its attempt to desentimentalize man, to re-integrate this over-civilized being into nature, returning him to more primitive, less alienated realities.

In these counterculture films, nudity has become casual and free, sensual or not, depending on circumstance, reflecting the non-pornographic outlook of the young.

While nudity has already been seen on West European TV, it made its first cautious appearance in America on national educational television during Alwin Nikolais'1972 ballet, *Relay*. Topless dancing even receivedconstitutional sanction, when the American Superior Court Judge Robert Winsor ruled in 1972 that "there can be no doubt that a go-go dancer is communicating" and hence is covered by the First Amendment protecting freedom of expression. But while commercial television(to "protect" the inevitable child audience) was stillanxiously preventing even fleeting shots of bared breasts,American cable television, on a 1972 medical program for doctorsbut available to all subscribers, brought a huge vagina into American living rooms for a 30-minute close-up of a cauterization procedure.

Ultimately the popularity of nudity (perhaps not only in a sexually repressed society) reflects a basic responseto our own beauty and sensuality and reveals the connection (if not, as Freud maintained, the inhibited identity) between sexual sensibility and the concept of beauty. Our frequent censorial agitation, our titillating scandals, and cautious see-sawing regarding "it" will undoubtedly be a source of much merrimentto future generations.

REFERENCES

(1) Richard S. Randall, *Censorship of the Movies*, 1970 (2) Randall

FILMS

THE BED

(James Broughton, USA, 1967)

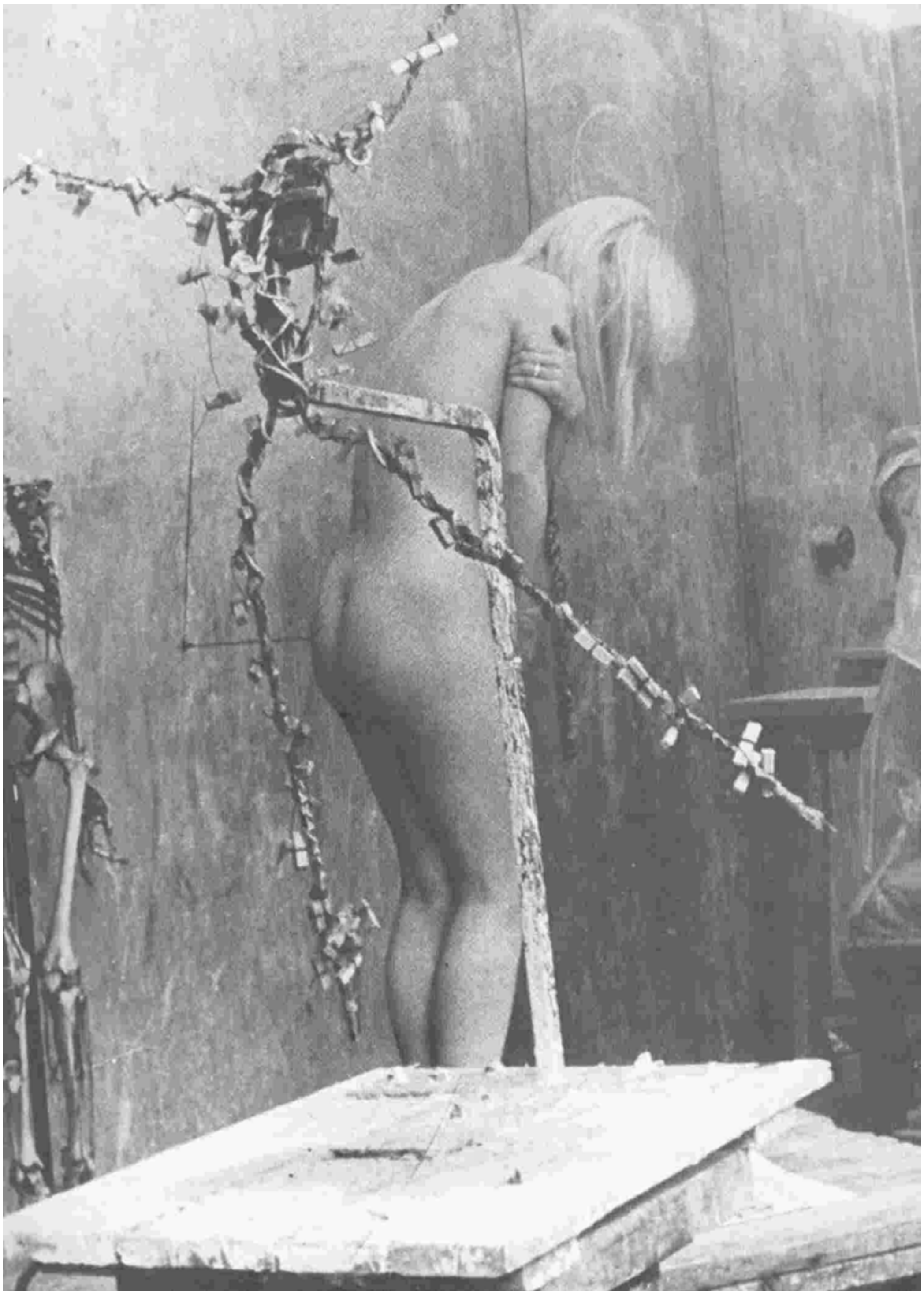
A perfect visual representation of the polymorphously perverse eroticism of the American counterculture and its Zen-like acceptance of all sexes and possibilities as one. Even the camera angle emphasizes the casualness and joyful abandon with which sex is viewed by the moment.

The entire cast of this delightful, wise manifesto of counter-culture sensibility performs in the nude. An ornate bed, magically located in a meadow, provides as always, the stage for man's most significantmoments; birth, sex, death. The actors, who exuberantly perform scenes of the human comedy, include Imogene Cunningham, AlanWatts, and other San Francisco artists and writers.While even avant-garde nudity seems often to betray an absence of joyful or uncomplicated sex, *The Bed* displays a smiling, polymorphously-perverse eroticism. For once, penises appear inlove scenes, but they are limp, denotic not impotence but the precise moment in time at which this film was made.

THE BED

(James Broughton, USA, 1967)

Ideological off-shoot of the American counterculture movement of the 60s, this first example of an all-nude film (starring many of San Francisco's best-known artists and writers) is a lyrical, poetic portrayal of "the bed" as the eternal arena of human life, love, and death.



THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AGE

(Jaroslav Papousek, Czechoslavakia, 1968) (F)

The film's director tendentious preoccupation with man's foibles proves that, under totalitarianism,the portrayal of purely human values becomes itselfideological. A young housewife, attempting to pose for art students, somehow changes through compositionand decor into a semi-surreal object; her warmsensuality is in counterpoint to an appropriateskeleton, while her hair provides the alienatinganonymity necessary for the final effect.

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

(Morgan Fisher, USA, 1968)

A nude girl on a stool reads a series of inane questions addressed to herself into a tape recorder without answering them, leaving 15 second pauses after each. Afterwards, she reruns the tape, rises, and answers each question with charming improvisations. An early example of structural cinema, the formalist meaninglessness of the action is continuously subverted by the girl's femininity and "hot" (however unaffected) nudity. As we "helplessly" waver between the two poles, a philosophical joke is being played on us.

ECSTASY

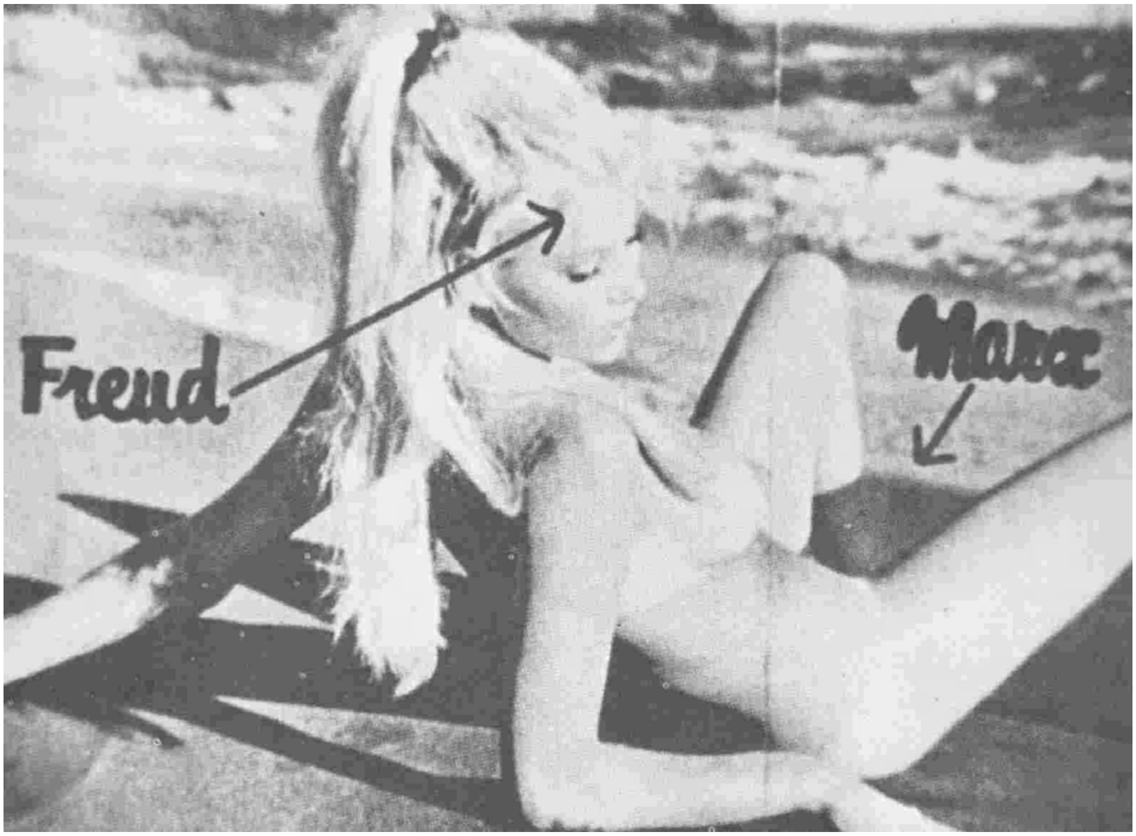
(Gustav Machaty, Czechoslavakia, 1933)

This much maligned film remains one of the great works of the poetic cinema, a sensuous story ofpassion and desire, seen entirely through a woman's eyes. Though known primarily for its then daring and unprecedented nude scenes, the film effectively attacked still another taboo in its lingering portrayal of Hedy Lamarr's orgasm (seen in her face only) during cunnilingus. Probably no other film in film history has been involved in more legal and censorial wrangling.

THE GOLDEN POSITIONS

(James Broughton, USA, 1970)

Nudity, combined with an age group not usually shown nude and with the accoutrements of bourgeois etiquette and attire, serves to debunk the pomposities of the well-bred. Particularly effective is the subjects' solemnity within the ridiculous position the filmmaker has placed them in.



LE GAI SAVOIR

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1969)

With typically playful perversity, Godard uses nudity to serve as ideological statement, surrealist and "obscene" in its unexpected transposition of Freud with brain and Marx with sex. These two names also denote the true parameters of Godard's universe and his determination to destroy illusionism by introducing lettering into the visuals.

LES MALES

(Gilles Carle, Canada, 1971)

A frequently erotic comedy of two drop-outs fromsociety whose Thoreau-like idyll in Canadianwoods is improved upon by a very real girl. The still conveys the mixture of sweet romanticism -- the girl, disarmingly asleep, framedby leaves -- and lust, free of Hollywood's sniggering sex. Film nudity has become casuing (though no less arousing than before).

TIME IN THE SUN

(USA, 1930)

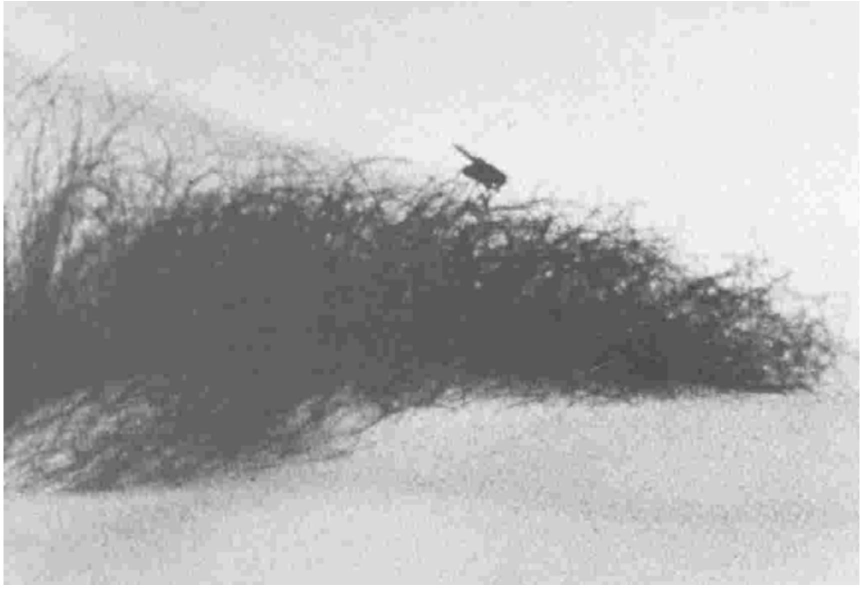
Mexico does strange things even to cosmopolitan (and inhibited) communists as seen in this unusual still from Eisenstein's unfinished Mexican film. The provocative pose of the girl, the play of light and shadow, the young man's languid yet watchful reaction, denote a hot, lazy erotic afternoon.

(edited by Marie Seton with Paul Burnford, from some of Sergei Eisenstein's footage for his unfinished film, *Que Viva Mexico*)

VIXEN

(Russ Meyer, USA, 1968)

The All-American girl, pensive and nature-loving, engulfed by vegetation. Until liberated by such sex pioneers of commercial cinema as Russ Meyer, she was forbidden practically into the sixties. SC



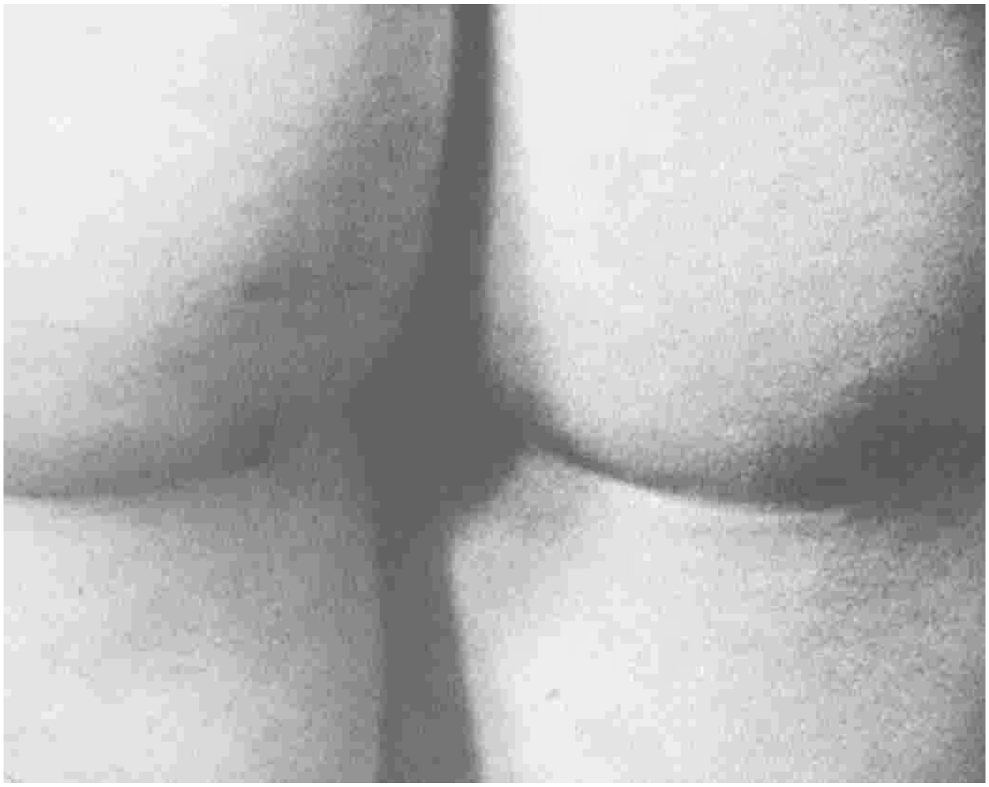
FLY

(Yoko Ono, USA, 1971)

Extreme magnification removes the eroticism of nudity, abstractifies the body, and reveals it

as a mysterious, unknown universe. Ironically,
the fly -- acting as intrepid explorer --
serves to "humanize" the proceedings. SC

A hypnotic juxtaposition of predatory insect and beautiful body, with neither party performing according to rules, thereby disrupting the reality game. For 25 minutes we see a very pretty girl, deeply asleep, over whose nude body creeps a diligent fly that never takes off but explores her fully, including pubic hair and sex. The film is almost entirely in close-up, with nipples appearing as mountain tops, the fly as climber, the girl's body as the fly's universe. Finally, the girl breathes; now there are many flies and long-shots of the girl's body inhabited by them; at last she shoosthem away.Much of the film seems to progress in real time,supposed guarantor of veracity. Yet, and with intentionalperversity, the odds are stacked in favor of artifice;both fly and girl are drugged; one to effect passivityunresponsive to constant irritation, the other to ensureperambulation and inability to fly.

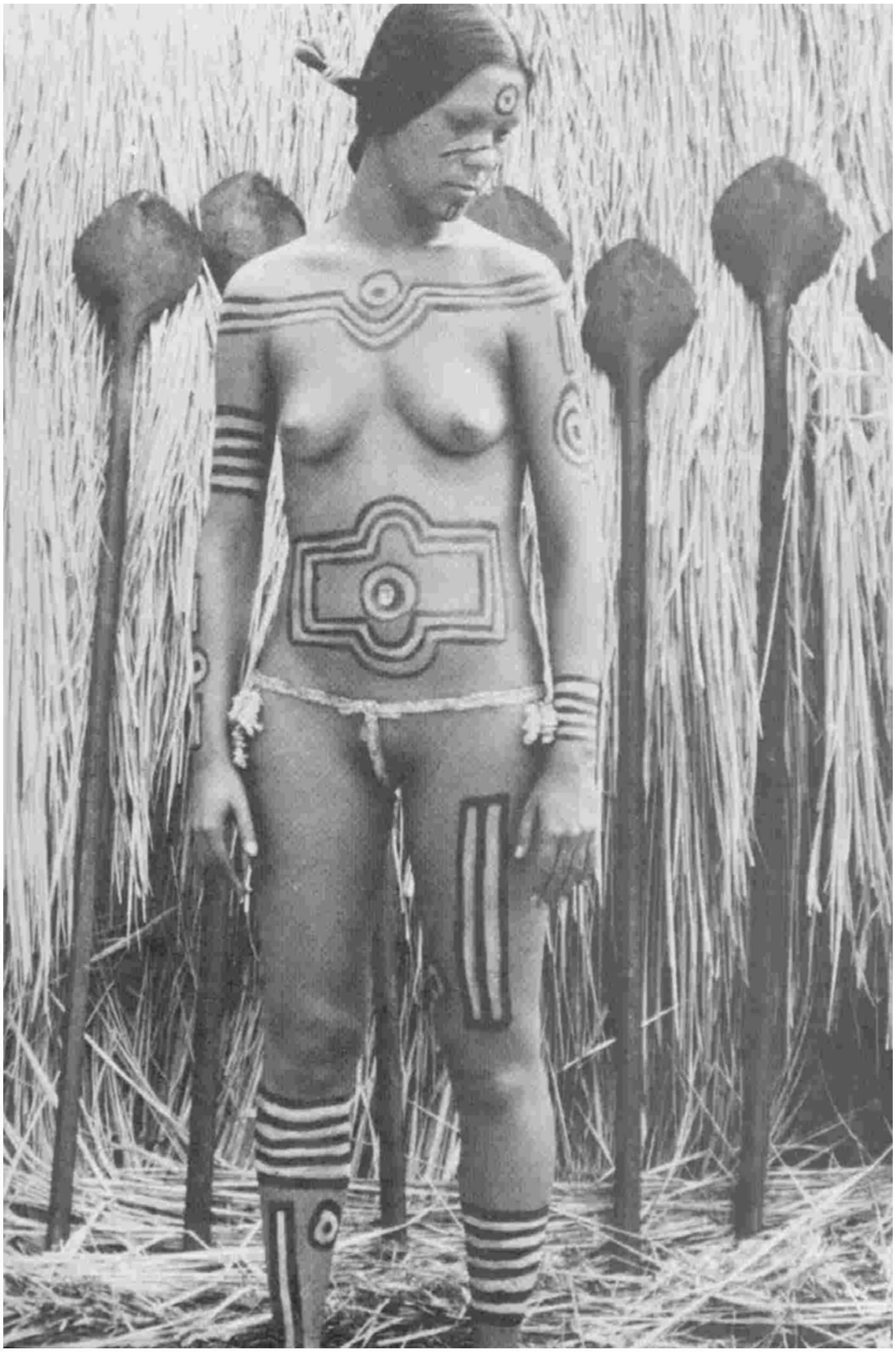


NUMBER 4

(Yoko Ono, Great Britain, 1968)

Unlike the portrayal of sex organs, the sight of buttocks is always somewhat humorous, denoting unconscious defense against a process considered objectionable, though harmless. Here 365 nude behinds (London's leading artists and intellectuals) pass the camera in never-ending procession at 20 second intervals for 90 minutes, while we are forcibly impressed by how different and alike we are. SC

For 90 minutes, 365 bare behinds of many of London's leading artists and intellectualspass the camera at 20 second intervals in anever-ending procession of hair or smoothness, carefully closed or casually open legs, dangling testicles, dimpled buttocks, sensuously rubbing thighs; soon they turn into hypnotic, semi-abstract designs.The soundtrack -- as unidentifiable as the visuals -- carries unstaged comments by the participants. Focusing on the mystery of the commonplace, this (very) "instructional"film proves buttocks to be an overlooked meansof self expression and consciousness-expansion.



HOW TASTY WAS MY LITTLE FRENCHMAN

(Nelson Pereira Dos Santos, Brazil, 1971)

A strange and comical exploration of the moral dimensions of cannibalism in 16th century Brazil, played by an all-nude cast, in which a French adventurer is finally "integrated" into a primitive tribe by being eaten. Nature and positioning of body paint as well as phallus-like objects in the back, reinforce the eroticism of the shot.

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LOVES OF A BLONDE
(Milos Forman, Czechoslavakia, 1965)
The East's first nude love scene; in the puritanical setting of these societies, a step as radical as the stylistic innovations of the other young Czech directors. Forman reintroduced the humanistic element into its cinema, exposing the viewer (in Chaplinesque alternations of laughter and held-in tears) to the sweetness and awkwardness of adolescence. SC

THE END OF SEXUAL TABOOS: EROTIC AND PORNOGRAPHIC CINEMA - PART ONE

As the sexual conservatives used to warn us,

once you allow one nude, a second (usually of the other sex) will soon join it leading to inevitable trouble. Beginning with the (albeit tentative) victory of nudity in film, this last decade has indeed for the first time raised the possibility of sexually explicit cinema as a mass phenomenon. Previously confined to brothels, stag parties, or illegal exhibitions, a series of court decisions in Scandinavia and America has now made public presentation of sex possible.

The old view of sex was clear and consistent. The censors, in their abiding solicitude for our moral welfare, had always to contend with this stubborn subject, but the guidelines were reasonably self-evident. In a typical and famous decision, an American judge declared Max Ophuls' La Ronde (based on Schnitzler's play) obscene for the following reasons:

> **That a film which panders to base human emotions is a breeding ground for sensuality, depravity, licentiousness and sexual immorality can hardly be doubted. That these vices represent a "clearand present danger" to the body social seems manifestly clear. (1)**

As always, it was the sex drive (here coded as "sensuality") that was the basic vice; it represents a "base" emotion and leads to depravity, licentiousness, and immorality.

Similarly, the pro-censorship minority of the 1967 American Presidential Commission on Obscenity quite clearly stated its fundamental objectives in its final dissent from the official (unexpectedly anti-censorship) report:

> **The obvious morals to be protected are chastity, modesty, temperance, and self-sacrificing love. The obvious evils to be inhibited are lust, excess, adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, masturbation, and fornication. (2)**

The basic evil is, again, the sex drive, from which all other vices derive. It is a significant restatement of Calvinist ideology to find chastity so directly counterposed to lust, modesty to excess, temperance to fornication; not to speak of bestiality, masturbation, and incest.

"Prurience" -- the perennial itch of mankind -- is the *bete noir* of all censors. The arousal of lust is considered evil; no justification for its prohibition is therefore even considered necessary in law; it appears as God-given.

An American court's decision banning Louis Malle's *Les Amants* outlined its reasons (and, unconsciously, its own reactions) quite specifically: "In a tantalizing and increasing tempo, the sex appetite is whetted and lascivious thoughts and lustful desires are intensely stimulated." (3) It is a testimony to the staying power of an atavistic taboo that what is perhaps the most sought-after emotion -- the arousal of sexual desire --is universally proscribed as evil.

Yet prurience -- even if it were admitted to be evil -- seems particularly ill-suited to legislation. For it appears that what actually constitutes prurience differs for churchgoers, sado-masochists, college graduates, different age groups, sexes, and classes. In fact, it would seem to differ even wth the same person, depending on his state of mind. According to the ruling of one American judge:

> **If he reads an obscene book while his sensuality is low, he will yawn over it. If he reads the Mechanics Lien Act while his sensuality is high, things will stand between him and the page that have no business there. (4)**

And G.V. Ramsey's study of sources of erotic stimuli of 291 young boys found these to include (among others!) fast elevator rides, sitting in class, sudden changes in environment, punishments, being scared, finding money -- and listening to the national anthem. (5)

Thus the very term "obscenity" seems impossible to define properly; it is, says Randall (an authority on the subject), the most familiar and the most elusive of concepts in law and social life. The American Commission on Obscenity found to its amazement that "none of the federal statutes prohibiting 'obscene' materials defines that term." American civil rights attorney Charles Rembar, in his book *The End of Obscenity*, declares, not so facetiously, that obscenity "is usually defined as lewd, lewd is defined as lascivious, lascivious as libidinous, libidinous as licentious, and licentious as lustful,"

Though today a surreptitious substitute for "sexual taboo", "obscenity" has the same origin in myth and religion. To those who think of it as "eternal", it may come as a shock to realize that in Anglo-American law it has been a criminal offense for only a hundred and fifty years; and that at first, anti-obscenity laws pertained to anti-religious materials (with sexual references). It was institutionalized religion and its puritan ethos that created these laws.

Prior to 1958, when nudist magazines were still considered obscene in America, a District Court offered its own spectacular definition of obscenity. Declaring (after necessarily close inspection) a photograph

in the *Sunshine and Health* magazine to be "obscene", it stated:

> **The woman has large elephantine breasts that hang from her shoulders to her waist. They are exceedingly large. The thighs are very obese. She is standing in the snow in galoshes. But the part which is offensive, obscene, filthy and indecent is the pubic areas shown. The hair extends outwardly virtually to the hip bone. (6)**

While the reasoning seems obscure -- is it the pubic hair that makes the photograph obscene or its extension to the hip bone? -- one cannot escape the impression that elephantine breasts, obese thighs, and last but not least, galoshes were additional factors in this judicial condemnation. While in America, at one time or another, even partial nudity and mildly suggestive, posed couples were declared obscene, the recent past has witnessed the shrinkage of the term to "hardcore" sex (actual intercourse, the camera emphasizing, rather than avoiding genitals and their interaction.)

One of the basic textbooks on American film censorship flatly states that "the legal regulation of stag films, of course, falls beyond the purview of this investigation. Such materials are clearly pornographic and are never shown publicly. Naturally, these films cannot be censored." (7) This was in 1966. Four years later, stag films were publicly shown all over America.

The commercial motivation behind such exhibitions -- now proceeding apace at advanced prices in well over 200 cinemas throughout the United States -- is obvious. Nevertheless, it is impossible to disregard the ideological framework provided by the sex reformers.

The libertarian view of obscenity, pornography, and sex is forcefully expressed by the French sexologist Rene Guyon in his *The Ethics of Sexual Acts*:

> **1. The convention which regards the sexual organs as shameful is without any foundation in reason, logic, or physiology; it would be just as possible and just as foolish to regard the nose, the tongue, or the act of swallowing, as shameful.**
>
> **2. The acts accompanying sexual pleasure find their only and sufficient justification in the pleasure that they bring; sexual pleasure is therefore just as admissible as any other natural satisfaction, and its exercise, in whatsoever form may be preferred, has nothing to do with the morality, the virtue or the dignity of either sex.**
>
> **3. Everybody has the right to exercise quite freely his own preferences in matters of sex, so long as he is guilty of no violence or deceit to others;**

the right to sexual satisfaction is just as inalienable as the right to eat. (8)

The most sensational support for the libertarian view unexpectedly has come from the 1970 report of the American Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. Its voluminous, heavily documented and researched, 650-page report (9) was the result of a Congressionally-initiated $2,000,000 study covering definitions, effects, extent, existing, and proposed legislation for the control of pornography and obscenity. Entirely an "Establishment" committee, its members included leading judges, educators, scientists, attorneys, psychiatrists, and clergymen.

Their conclusions, embodied in what is a historic document, contradicted in every instance the popular stereotypes regarding pornography. This was even more significant in the light of the fact that due to the lack of sufficient experimental data, the commission had initiated careful studies, tests, and research to arrive at its findings.

Entirely unexpectedly, the report called for the repeal of all laws against the showing and selling of sexually-explicit films, books, and other materials to consenting adults. ("Sexually-explicit" was chosen to avoid the pejorative term "pornography".)

Declaring it "exceedingly unwise to attempt to legislate individual moral values and standards", the recommendations were based on detailed findings that sexually-explicit materials do not cause crime, juvenile delinquency, anti-social acts, character disorder, sexual or non-sexual deviation. The Commission stated (10) that national surveys of psychiatrists, psychologists, sex educators, social workers, and counsellors show a large majority to believe that sexual materials do not have harmful effects on either adults or adolescents.

It did find that exposure to erotic stimuli produced sexual arousal in most men and women) (women being not less aroused than men) and, not surprisingly, that the young of both sexes (especially if college educated, religiously inactive, and sexually experienced) were more easily stimulated. This arousal led to a temporary increase in masturbation or coital behavior for some, a temporary decrease for others (!) and no change in behavior for the majority.

Established patterns of sexual behavior were not found to be substantially altered by exposure to eroticism, though pre-existing patterns may be temporarily activated: another way of saying that one does not become a sado-masochist, a homosexual, or a rapist by looking or by reading.

Substantial numbers of married couples reported better and more

agreeable marital communication, increased feelings of love and closeness, increased willingness to discuss sexual matters and to experiment, and greater tolerance towards other peoples' sex activities.

Most importantly, no link whatsoever was found with sex crimes. In fact, sex offenders were found to have had less adolescent exposure to erotica than other adults, less sexual experience, and a more repressive and sexually deprived environment.

The conclusions of the Commission were very specific:

> **a. The Commission recommends that *federal, state and local legislation prohibiting the sale, exhibition and distribution of sexual materials to consenting adults be repealed*.**
>
> **b. Governmental regulation of moral choice can deprive the individual of the responsibility for personal decision which is essential to the formation of genuine moral standards. Such regulations would also tend to establish an official moral orthodoxy, contrary to our most fundamental constitutional traditions.**
>
> **c. Though there is no definite evidence, the Commission favors, due to insufficient research, that children not be exposed to pictorial eroticism (except by parents), this to be reconsidered every six years due to changing standards.**
>
> **d. The Commission does not believe that sufficient social justification exists for the retention or enactment of broad legislation prohibiting the consensual distribution of sexual materials to adults.**
>
> ***We therefore do not recommend any definition of what is obscene for adults*. (11) (Author's emphasis)**

Significantly, the Commission's report (though further vindicated in European sex studies) (12), was immediately denounced by President Nixon who "categorically rejected its morally bankrupt conclusions" and promised that "pornography which can corrupt and poison the wellsprings of American and Western culture and civilization" would be controlled if not eliminated under his aegis. The first major step came with the stunning June 1973 Nixon Supreme Court decision significantly broadening the obscenity concept and for the first time leaving its definition to "local communities"; a film may thus be obscene in Utah but not in New York. The consequences were immediate; widespread lawsuits, capricious police action, and, more ominously, self-censorship that tailored works to the most inoffensive common denominator. Explicit sexual materials -- far from being eliminated -- were instead driven underground once more, leading to higher prices and organized crime infiltration. But a full return to the old puritanism may no longer be possible.

This is particularly due to the new value systems

of the young and the counterculture. In his classic on underground ideology, Jeff Nuttall lists eight basic tenets as embodying its value; the last is a demand

> **... to eradicate utterly and forever the Pauline lie implicit in Christian convention, that people neither shit, piss nor fuck. To set up a common public idea of what a human being is that retains no hypocrisy or falsehood, and indeed, to reinstate a sense of health and beauty pertaining to the genitals and the arsehole. (13)**

Carried over into the realm of art, the new freedom entails a demand for eroticism as a positive good and explains why it was the international (particularly American) underground and avant-garde cinema which, in film after film, acted as its pioneer and catalyst:

> **Partly as a result of prohibition, art which deals with the theme of sex satisfaction, recollected, anticipated or imagined, is probably the only thematic art for which, if it were available, there now would be a consistent and general demand in our society -- wide enough to perform the unimaginable and restore contact between artists and the general public (14)**

Due to previous total supression, the sudden sexual permissiveness in film has indeed brought with it a quick escalation from "soft" to "hard-core" sex, allowing almost no possibility for the development of a truly erotic cinema.

The last thing present-day hardcore films can be accused of is subtlety, lyricism, erotic tension, or what the Kronhausens quite properly call "erotic realism" as against the "wish-fulfillment fantasy of hardcore pornography". (15) This "skipped" chapter will undoubtedly develop in a future more relaxed about sex; indeed, by adding the dimension of feeling and erotic tension to that of physiological urge, the result by virtue of its power of provocation will be far more subversive that present-day hardcore films are. (Both *I Am Curious - Yellow* and *Last Tango in Paris* are indications of things to come, as are erotic works made from a woman's viewpoint.) This (together with the entrance of women filmmakers into this field) contributes to the elimination of the unquestionably "sexist" (because male-oriented) aspects of present-day hardcore cinema.

The conquest of the final visual taboo -- the realistic, poetic, or lyrical portrayal of the sex act -- is the undeniable goal of subversive film artists today.

They have already succeeded in portraying orgasm. This "sweet death" is particularly threatening to the bourgeois and the censorious; for it is disruptive and anarchic -- possibly the only ecstatic experience left to man -- a moment of total self-surrender by dissolution into the beloved and thereby into the world. Such destruction of all bonds of logic and citizenship is a dangerous pleasure, to be tolerated at best; it is certainly not to be freely displayed in public.

Yet even in terms of the sex act, the cinema has come a long way from love scenes with discreet cut-aways to sunsets or the later, more "daring" use of wildly waving bushes, flowers bending under wind thrusts, and suddenly gushing waters. Starting with nudity, then motion, sound, and long shots of nude coupling, the cinema is (unsteadily) progressing towards the documentary portrayal of the sex act in all its forms. For the moment (and even here not necessarily permanently) this development seems limited to America, Scandinavia, and, in part, West Europe. In the "hardcore" films now publicly shown in these countries, even the erect penis -- to the censor the most dangerous image in the known universe -- and its combination with the female organ during intercourse are permissible. The growing incursion of such visuals (and their sensational box office success) indicate that it may not be possible to revert to former norms, unless totalitarian controls are imposed. Given existing international tendencies, this is entirely possible.

If, in today's sex films, the "pornographic" element predominates, this is because they are produced within the context of a sexually repressed society. The huge financial success of the hardcore films cannot be explained in any other manner. Yet, even in this market, significant attempts are being made in the direction of the erotic film, combining uncensored realism with tenderness, humor, mishaps, and the inevitable non-erotic components of every real act of human love.

One can only hope that eventually arousal of erotic feelings in the cinema will take the place of the aggression and violence, predominant in films today; but this is part of the larger struggle in the world between Eros and Thanatos.

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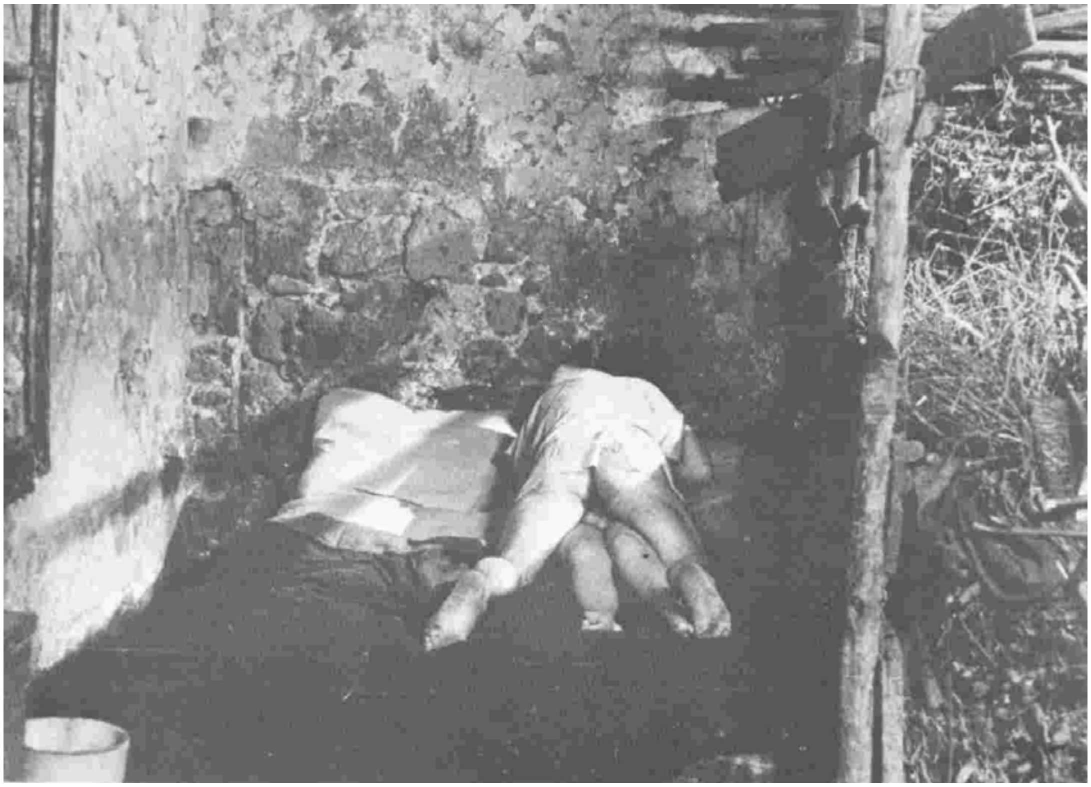
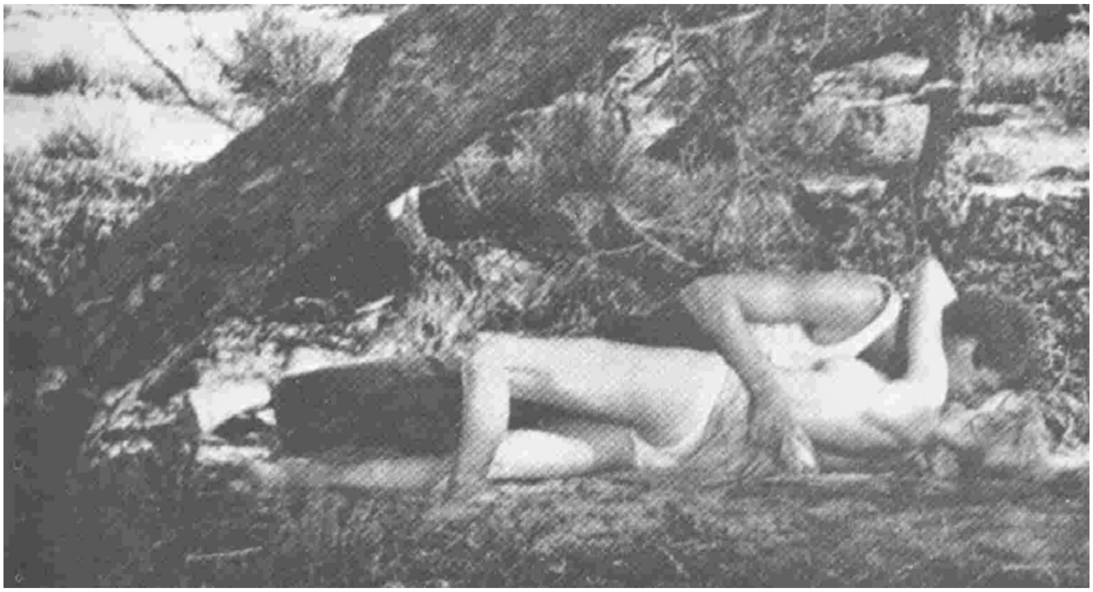
FILMS



THE DECAMERON
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy/France/Germany, 1970)
This dilapidated room -- invaded by vegetation and almost outdoors -- reinforces the romanticism, sensuality, and earthiness of this visual metaphor for Boccaccio. The man's balls are startling additions to the repertory of commercial cinema. Light and shadow add to the atmosphere. SC



AND GOD CREATED WOMAN

(Roger Vadim, France, 1956) (F)

From *Ecstasy* to *I Am Curious - Yellow*, every generation has had its own scandalous "breakthrough" film; in the 50s, it was *And God Created Woman*; indeed, Bardot's uninhibited sexuality and, in this still, the display of nude breasts, panties, and male removing her clothing was quite unprecedented; the couple's legs, however, were still in "correct" (unentangled) position. Note rigid tree towering overhead.

BARBARELLA

(Roger Vadim, France, 1968) (F)

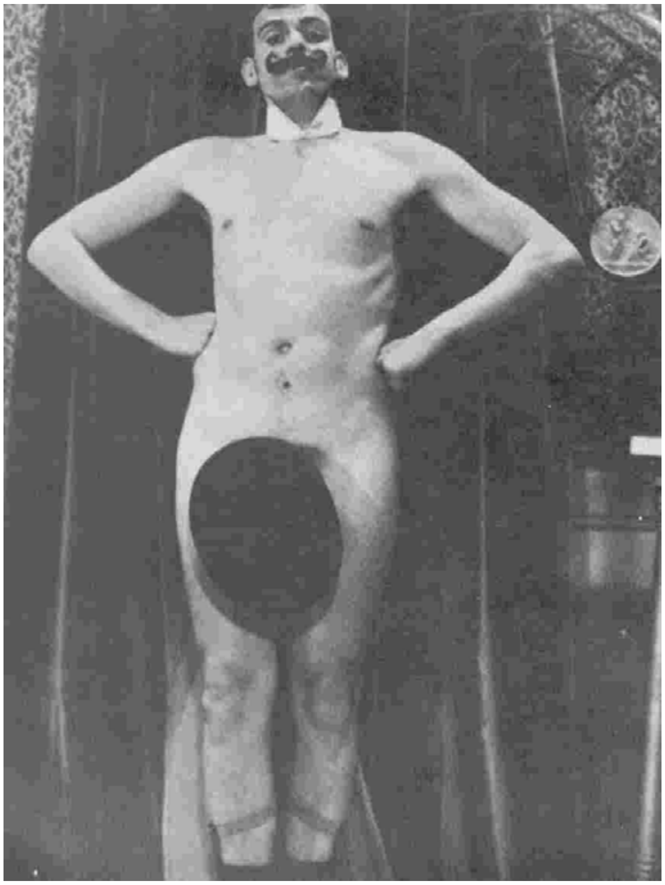
Jane embedded nude in the undulating torture-by-continuous orgasm machine, surrounded by earlier victims. Though almost expiring amidst delicious swoons, Jane finally blows the machine's fuse by her orgiastic potency. A good example of Vadim's elegant, perverse, and campy eroticism. SC

The flamboyant, perverse, and tongue-in-cheek eroticism of this work -- reinforced by its glossy pop-art colors and camp decor, a Terry Southern script and Jane Fonda's pseudo-virginal sensuality -- marks it as a highpoint of sophisticated commercial sex cinema. Titillatingly avoiding frontal nudity (not permissive at the time), it concentrates instead on continual suggestiveness (extending even to the decor and to sado-masochist and lesbian interludes), and culminates in the fabulous torture-by-continuous-orgasm machine in which Jane almost deliriously expires before blowing its fuse by her orgiastic potency; her lustful, pained grimaces and moans, the undulating movements of the machine (in which she is embedded, nude) prove the ingenuity of commercial filmmakers intent on cheating the censors.

"BEAVER" FILMS

(USA, 1970 ff.)

Tribute must be paid to an early variety of publicly shown pornography, the "beaver" films, so-called because nude females display their genitals in a succession of ultimately saddening pseudo-erotic contortions and come-on movements. Characteristically, the woman is posed on a bed, alone; there is no heterosexual activity, though masturbation and passion is frequently simulated. A sensation at first, these films quickly gave way to soft- and hard-core cinema sex. Their sudden popularity was a perverse hymn to the vagina (not easily available to lonely introverts) which had previously been kept a mysterious secret by the censors.



DANISH BLUE

(Gabriel Axel, Denmark, 1968) (F)

One of the few pornographic comedies, Danish Blue takes a delightfully offhand attitude toward sexual mores. In this shot, the "forbidden" is clearly established without being shown, a rare feat. In addition, a visual pun is made.

BLACK PUDDING

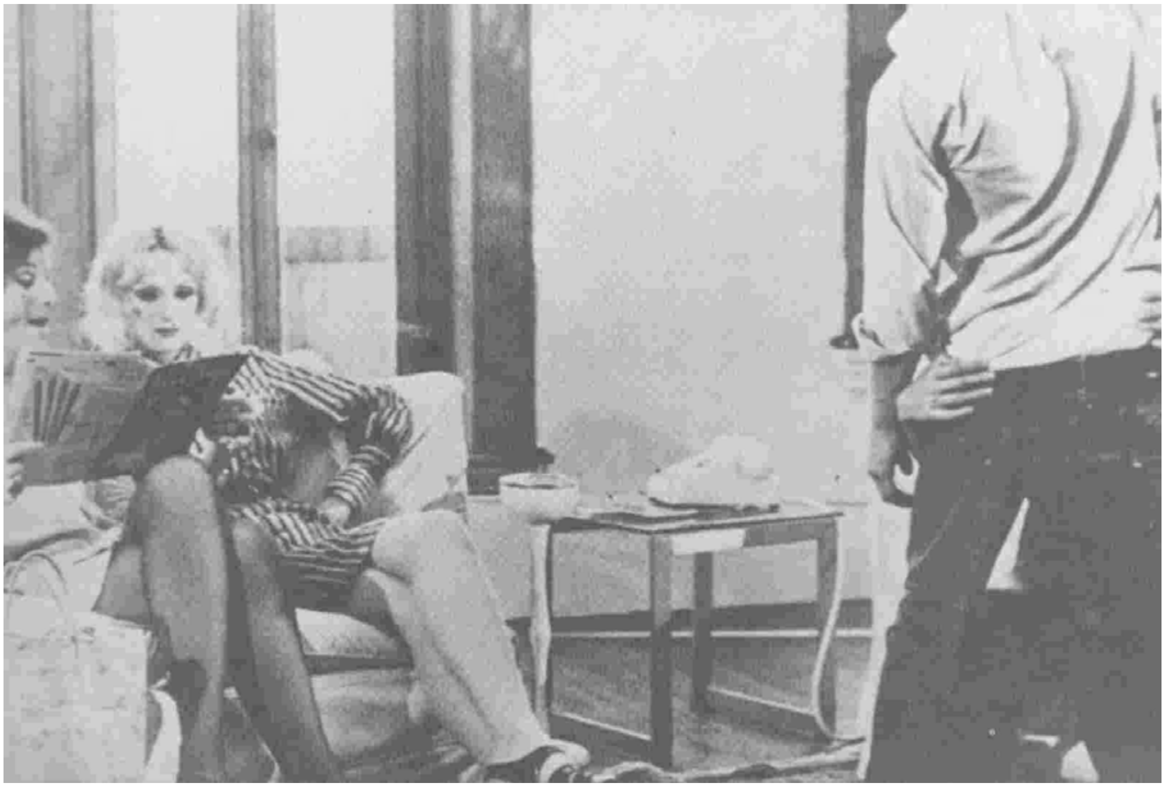
(Nancy Edell, Great Britain, 1971)

The violent pornographic surrealism of American underground cartoon magazines finally invades film animation. In an unfathomable universe, huge vaginas and penises are protagonists of bizarre, violent, and pornographic events; the mixture of monsters and sexuality, the perverse and the apocalyptic are reminiscent of Bosch.

THE CONTINUING STORY OF CAREL AND FERD

(Arthur Ginsberg, USA, 1972) (F)

This "underground video soap opera" -- presented in an astonishing eight-television screen, closed-circuit, live-performance format, begins where commercial TV lets off. A "video-verite" study of a sometime homosexual junkie and his girl (both former porno filmmakers), it is accurately billed as a "videotape novel about pornography, sexual identities, and the effect of living too close to an electronic medium." The work is performed "live" before an audience by the director manipulating the eight monitors, mixing different or identical action on one, several or all of them; the "films" thus changes daily. Though attention is usually spread among all monitors, the sudden appearance of sex on even one set immediately "distorts" the balance, a tribute to its power.



FLESH

(Paul Morrisey, USA, 1968) (F)

The outspoken yet entirely casual sexuality of the Warhol-Morrisey films is conveyed in this scene of domestic bliss; fellation occurs on-screen, but in a manner difficult to censor, its protagonist almost as uninterested as the two people on the couch. Not everyone in this still who seems to be a girl actually is. SC

COMING APART

(Milton Moses Ginsberg, USA, 1969) (F)

A good example of erotic realism; Hollywood could never have envisioned so off-beat and human a shot. These are two people who know each other very well and this is their little universe. The action is seen in a mirror by a concealed camera recording the protagonist's increaingly problematic sex life. SC

This powerful, unsettling film elevates voyeurism to its central element in a series of raw sexual encounters reflected in an apartment mirror, from which a hidden camera records its images. The lustful sex turns increasingly pathetic and the mirror is finally smashed in despair. The "playing" on reality -- the entire film is staged, the mirror thus reflecting a double illusion -- is eminently modern and structural, as is the camera's passive immobility, with action at times leaving the frame or the film "running out".

DEAR JOHN

(Lars Magnus Lindgren, Sweden, 1964) (F)

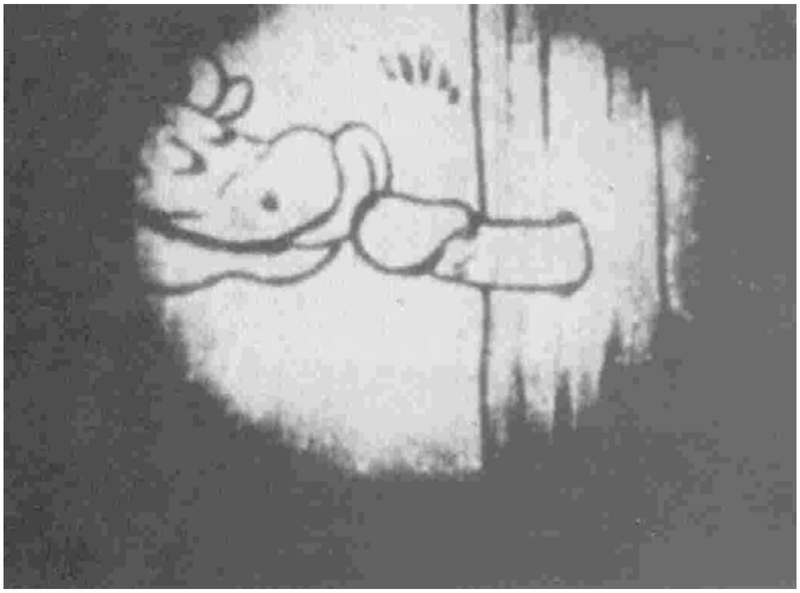
Nothing particularly unusual about this shot except that the woman's panties have just been removed. In this frank early example of adult sex could be found an eroticism tinged with tenderness and the mishaps of daily life.

Frankness and honesty characterize this rare and early portrayal of adult sex in the context of a true love relation; as the past is remembered in a warm and loving bed, we discover an eroticism tinged with tenderness, laughter, and the mishaps of daily life. Dropped panties, references to penis size and contraception make their belated cinematic appearance.

THE LICKERISH QUARTET

(Radley Metzger, USA, 1970) (F)

Early attempts at commercial eroticism avoided long shots because they were too stimulating to show nude bodies full-length during sex was too much for censors. Only in the later 60s did commercial sex film pioneers begin to use them. SC



EVERREADY

(Anonymous, USA, circa 1925)

Pornographic cartoons are rarer than live "hardcore" films, though the freedom available to the animator allows more intricate action. These cartoons usually consist of a series of "dirty jokes"

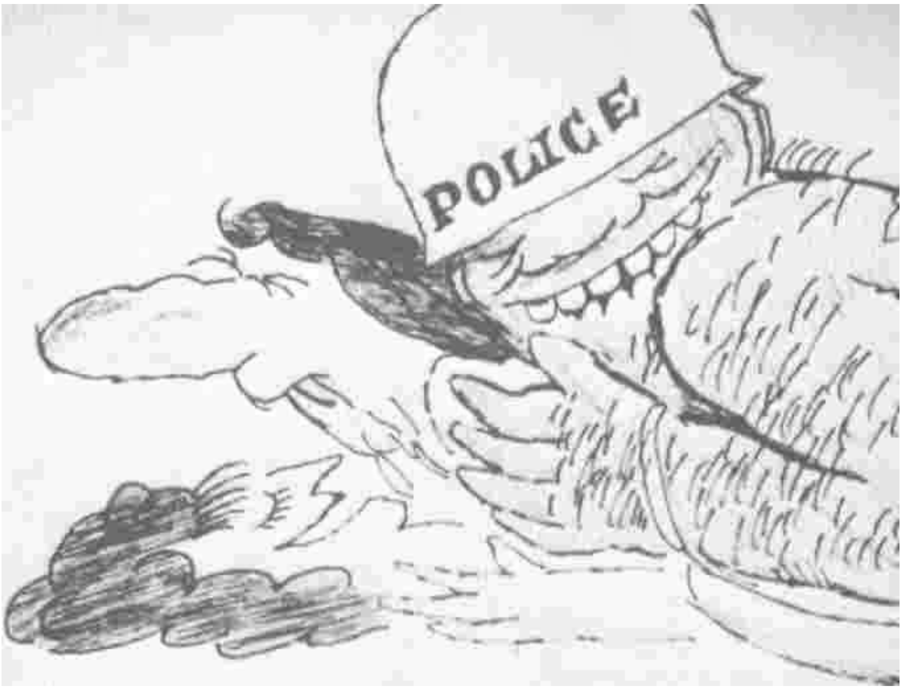
and avoid the heavy- breathing solemnity of the "live" films. The erect penis violates a basic taboo.

Excellent and rare example of a pornographic cartoon, skillfully drawn and edited for belly-laughs. The hero sports the world's largest and stiffest tool -- he even requires a wheelbarrow to support it -- which seems to have a mind of its own and involves its possessor in one pornographic adventure after another; even cows are not excluded.

ELECTROSEX

(Anonymous, USA, 1970)

One of the earliest and most successful of the new crop of hardcore American pornographic films. Its convenient plot introduces three female robots (played by nubile young ladies) who, upon command, can and do perform all sex acts known to man. After 40 minutes or so of athletic and lustful cavorting, the male protagonists tire; but, in a sombre subversion of the genre, the girl-robots cannot be stopped, and the men die in a fit of excrutiating sexual exhaustion.



MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR

(Zlatko Grgic, Yugoslavia, 1971)

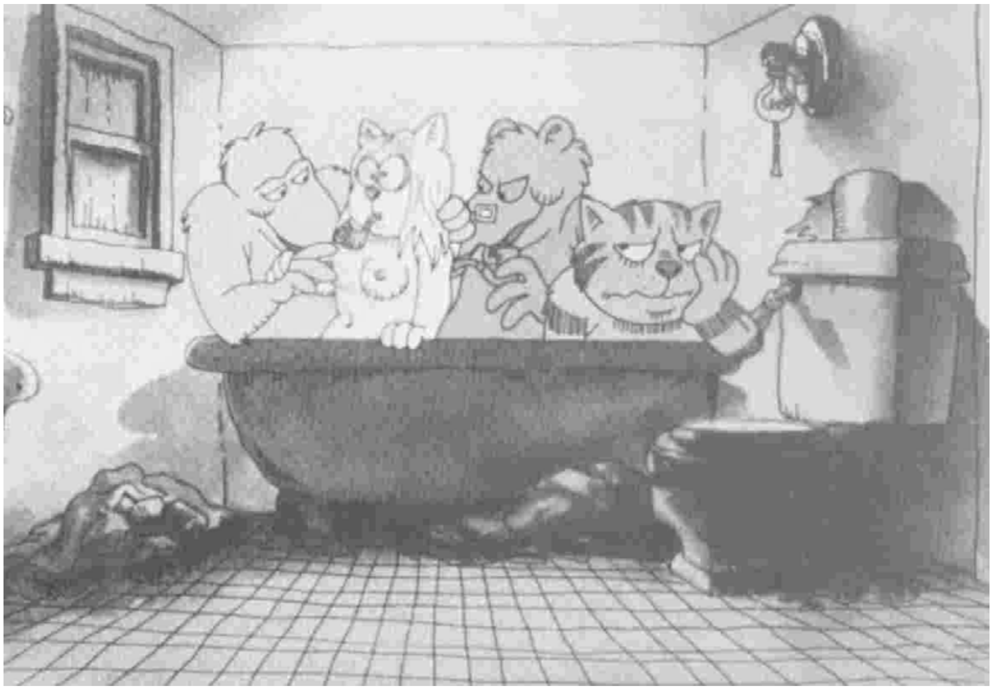
In the course of this 60-second animation, two hippies, rather incongruously, make love during a political demonstration; a policeman, unasked, joins them from

behind. A dirty joke from Yugoslavia.

FUSES

(Carolee Schneemann, USA, 1964-67)

A unique film document by one of America's most original intermedia artists. Drawing on documentary footage of her and her lover's lovemaking, it builds a strongly poetic texture of feeling and experience by subjecting the filmstrip to the most violent experimentation (soaking it in acids and dyes; baking, painting, and scratching it) and dissolving narrative continuity into a continuum of non-sequential, polymorphous and strongly "pornographic" imagery. Nevertheless, as Gene Youngblood observes in *Expanded Cinema*: "This is a home, not a whorehouse" and the filmmaker's sensitivity and authenticity never let us forget it.



FRITZ THE CAT

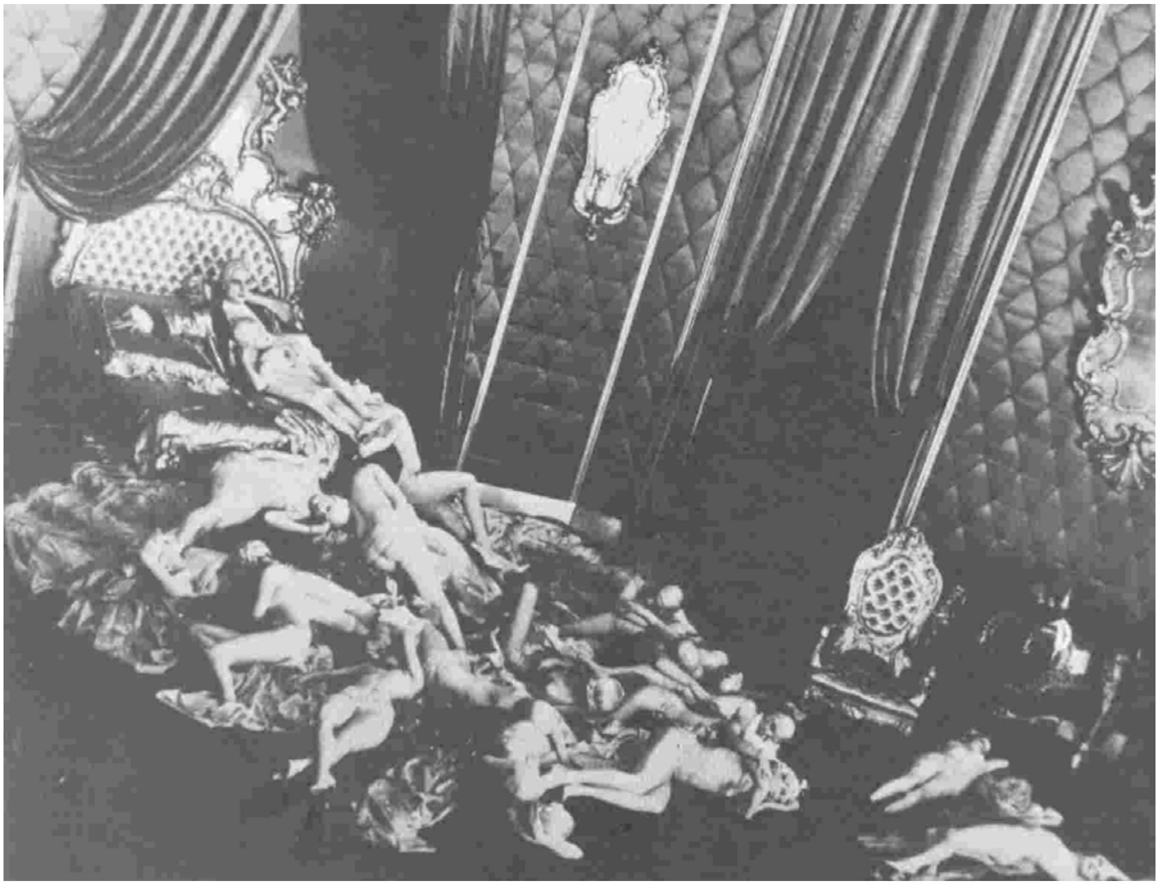
(Ralph Bakshi, USA, 1972) (F)

The erotic adventures of Fritz the Cat introduce actual intercourse to the animated film, not to speak of a certain grimy realism. Here some males with evil intentions introduce a young maiden to smoking pot. SC

THE GO-BETWEEN

(Joseph Losey, Great Britain, 1971) (F)

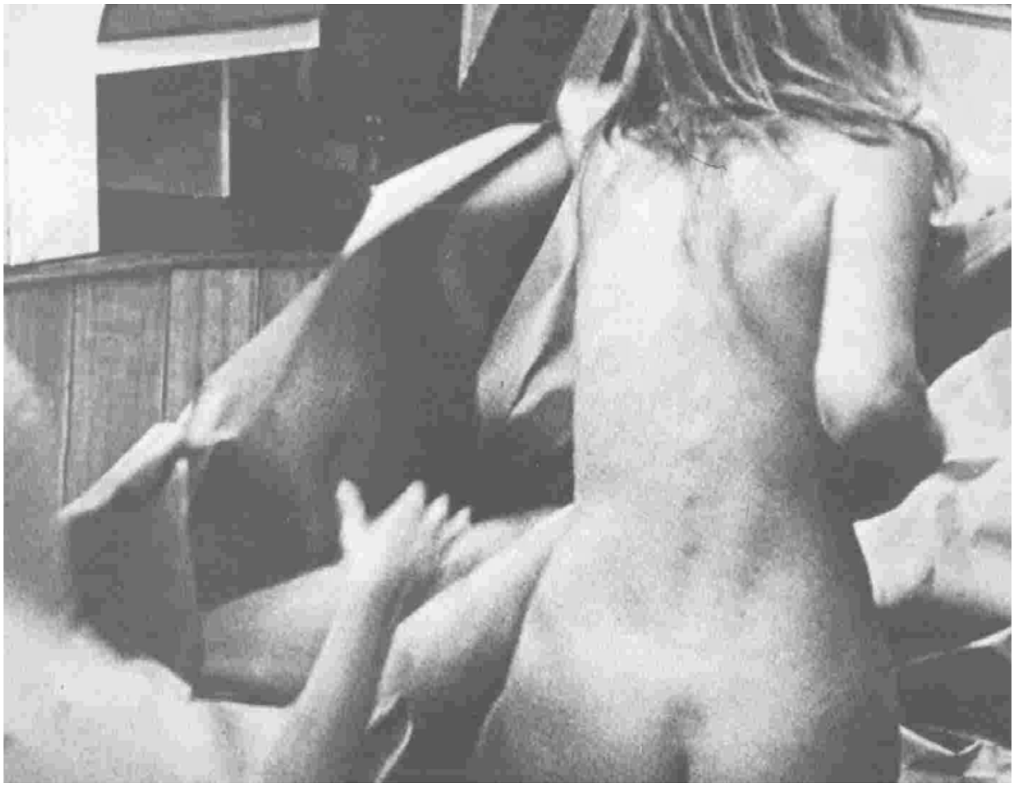
An interesting use of a taboo image furnishes the climax of this elegant, tense dissection of Edwardian society, its mores and rigidities at the turn of the century, based on a Harold Pinter script. The story of a boy who becomes a clandestine messenger in an affair between a daughter of the landed gentry and a virile tenant farmer, its images -- safe and bourgeois on the surface -- are punctuated by darker hints, until, in the denouement, the boy discovers the two lovers in the sex act. Only a glimpse is shown and there is no nudity; yet, the image of the man straddling the woman, enfolded by her legs, is unequivocal and -- given the restraint of the rest of the film -- intentionally scandalous.



CASANOVA

(Alexander Wolkov, France, 1927)

Orgy Then: everybody is tired except Don Juan who surveys the carnage in jaded satiation (just a day's work ...), re-emphasized in his magnificently extended right arm. Everybody is carefully draped. The use of strongly slanted lines introduces a perverse element in what otherwise would have been a dead, academic composition.



BLOW-UP
(Michelangelo Antonioni, Great Britain, 1966)
Orgy Now: The famous scene in Blow-Up -- carefully excised in many countries -- in which two stray London "birds" finally involve the photographer in casual sex on the floor. The glimpse of pubic hair was unprecedented. SC

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

EROTIC & PORNOGRAPHIC CINEMA - PART TWO

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

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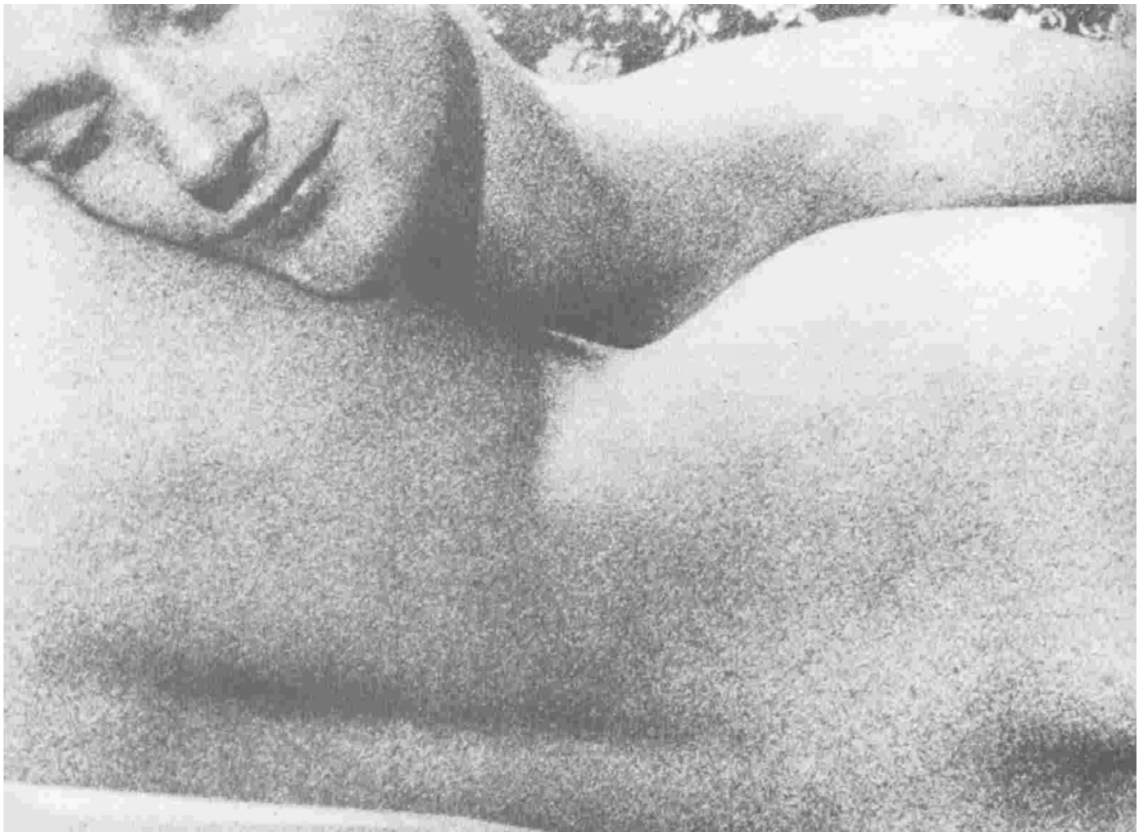
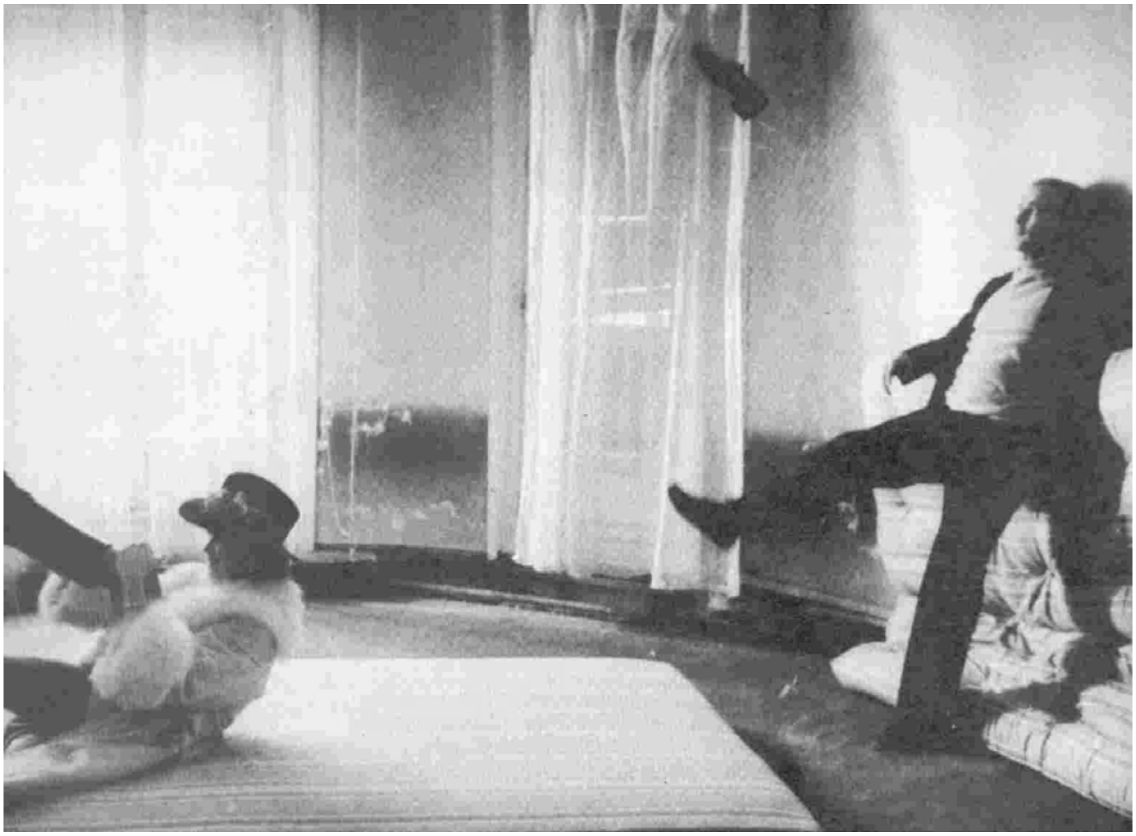


L'OPERA MOUFFE
(Agnes Varda, France, 1958) (F)
Two nude lovers experience sweet and smiling pleasure in each other's bodies. From a haunting, impressionist film poem by the well-known French director. The lines of the two bodies seem visually to fuse in fulfilled love.

THE END OF SEXUAL TABOOS: EROTIC AND PORNOGRAPHIC CINEMA - PART TWO

FILMS



LAST TANGO IN PARIS

(Bernardo Bertolucci, France/Italy, 1972) (F)

After years of disregard, the international fame so suddenly bestowed upon Bertolucci for having created a "breakthrough" film all but obscures the question of just what this "breakthrough" is meant to be; for neither stylistically, thematically nor in terms of erotic tension does it go beyond *Before the Revolution*, his best work. In fact, the youthful excesses andvisual lyricism of this earlier work seem preferable to the more conventional and subdued style of *Tango*; and the intellectual weight and ideological subtlely of *Revolution* are far more substantial than the puzzling "message" of *Tango*. As for *Tango*'s sex scenes -- its most brilliant aspect -- their explicitness neither goes as far as hardcore pornography nor, if this comparison be considered fair, beyond *I Am Curious - Yellow / Blue*, the real pioneer of liberated cinema sex. SC

This earlier work contained, just as *Tango* does, explicit simulated copulation, sexual violence and near-rape; it also featured, as *Tango* does not, frontal male nudity and joyful erotic tension quite different from the sado-masochist violence of Bertolucci's film. The "breakthrough", then, is in the production and distribution of such a film by a major Hollywood company, United Artists.

The film's stark erotic realism is powerful, but not unique. Extensive verbal "obscenity" (fully anticipated in Joseph Strick's *Tropic of Cancer*, 1970) and an absence of sentimentality or titillation are welcome aspects. But even if one entirely discounts the hardcore films now available at least in certain countries, only those who did not see *Curious* will be shocked by coital movements, "unusual" positions, orgasmic sounds. And in carefully avoiding certain images, such as male frontal nudity, Bertolucci raises uncomfortable questions; for in *Revolution*, his unfettered artistic passion never allowed calculated avoidance of anything crucial; and penises are crucial to a film pivoting on sex, particularly as full female frontal nudity makes its appearance. Equally disturbing are unannounced post-premiere cuts involving an ironic revelation of what today is considered commercially inadvisable in America; not sex, but blasphemy.

Significantly, the only kind of sex missing in *Curious* is represented in *Tango* by the tragic moment when the girl, in order to get rid of him, masturbates Brando,; but then at least the men in *Curious* had penises. Still more symptomatic, what is possibly the most "shocking" image in the film may be the bar of butter Brando reaches for in preparation for anal intercourse; it derives its shock quality solely from its association with the sex act that follows.

It is ironic, but not without precedent, that Bertolucci, from the beginning a superlative, original talent who until recently could find neither financing nor distribution, should gain instantaneous international fame with what is essentially a work of transition towards either large commercial success or artistic maturity.

ECHOES OF SILENCE

(Peter Emanuel Goldman, USA, 1965) (F)

Desperate sexuality, desperate emotions; every gesture and inflection an act of grave import; a film of young adults, infused with a new existentialist humanism, devoid of certainty or illusion. The sharp contrast and graniness of the still indicate the film's distance from slick commercial cinema. A major new talent.

HISTORY OF THE BLUE MOVIE

(Alex de Renzie, USA, 1971) (F)

Perhaps the most startling this about this film -- prototype of a genre -- is its legal and widespread presentation to packed student audiences at American colleges. An excellent compilation of old and new hardcore "stag" films (with an intelligent narration stressing historical aspects), its production was probably inevitable the moment it was realized that no one held a copyright of these illegal, anonymous works. Here we see one of the earliest stag films, the 1915 *A Free Ride*; an unexpected item, or it somehow still remains surprising to see our forefathers (now dead) actually engaged in the same activities as we are. There are also interesting divergences from the later, more standardized stag films: here both male and female urinate, for laughs, on camera; during sex, the man only drops his pants, looking very real, very ludicrous in his passionate entanglement; and the girls seem literally exhausted at the end. There are other classics in this anthology: the notorious *Smart Aleck*, in which the then unknown Candy Barr introduces unintended "cinema verite" into a porno film by angrily refusing to perform fellatio, only later passionately to "insert" herself into an oral sex act between her partner and another girl; and the equally famous *The None Story*, whose star, at beginning and end, appears in a nun's attire (these sequences omitted from a later version retitled "College Co-Ed".) A 3rd notable episode shows a nude model discussing her sexual preferences with an unseen interviewer in sensitive, arousing detail, the camera focusing mostly on her face in an example of verbal eroticism reminiscent of Godard's *Weekend*. As her talk turns more passionate and fantasy-ridden, she becomes involved in on-screen masturbation; and both she and the interviewer fall silent until her climax. The film ends with an erotic 1970 sequence, in which a young couple go to De Renzie's studio to act in one of his films and then see themselves on the screen in a highly charged, professionally directed sex episode which (delightfully) includes laughter, hugs, and warmth; a portent of things to come when serious filmmakers, free of censorship or contempt for the genre, supplant the mechanical pornographers by introducing erotic realism. SC

I AM CURIOUS - YELLOW / BLUE
(JAG AR NYFIKEN - GUL / BLA)

(Vilgot Sjoman, Sweden, 1967) (F)

A cluttered room, a hastily made floor bed, an eager young couple: a scene from the legendary work that opened commercial cinema to eroticism and pornography. Sex is demystified, desentimentalized, shown as a part of life. Coital activity is frequently and directly shown; but there are no erections not penetrations, as there are in today's hardcore films. SC

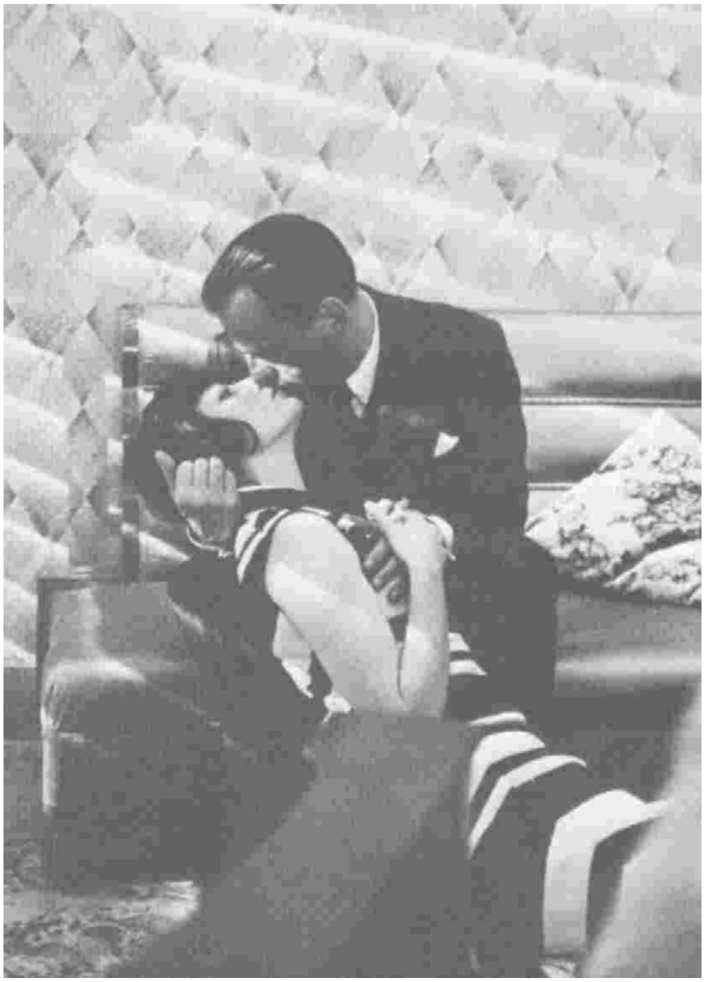
The historical task of the leadership, said Rosa Luxemburg, is to make itself unnecessary. This is precisely what happened to this legendary, much-maligned work; prime catalyst of the new "permissive" cinema, it was quickly superseded by works that went further though not necessarily deeper. In retrospect, its primary virtue lies in its erotic realism. Perhaps no other film before it was as direct in presuming that everybody does it, knows about it, enjoys it; does it at times with laughter, or imperfectly, tenderly, or in rage, and that it is silly to exclude so human and beloved an enterprise from the screen. Thus we see sex done on a hastily cleared floor (though the bra at first will not unhook), in a lake (with a long-shot of heaving buttocks periodically emerging from the water), in a tree (a messy, giggly affair), from behind (in anger and lust), and while straddling the balustrade of the Royal Palace in Stockholm, with a guard in attention, sweating to keep his composure amidst dropping panties and voluptuous movements. The lovemaking throughout is neither

titillating, mechanical, bourgeois nor "deeply significant"; but casual and free, filled with warmth, strife, and experimentation. He is her "Number 30" or so and there will be others (including Sjoman, the film's director who periodically enters the action, and intentionally blurs reality and illusion).

The portrayal of sex goes further than ever before. There is no mistaking the spread legs, the man between them, the movements, the outspoken dialogue. Yet, while sex organs are sometimes shown and even (somewhat) manipulated, we see no erection nor penetration.

But the sex scenes (at least on first viewing) overshadow the film's main theme: the attack on the values (or lack of values) of the Swedish welfare state and contemporary society in general. Alienation, cynicism, and boredom seem to characterize the people appearing in its many political discussions and interviews. The young heroine both investigates and symbolizes the social and sexual mores of an affluent and fatigued welfare state, fearful of revealing itself as a class society. The sexual episodes are used as counterpoint to the alienation she feels towards her society and appear as attempts (however superficial) at human reaffirmation; they are essential components of an ideological statement.

The final subversion of the work is in its form. Sjoman, as other c contemporary filmmakers, aims at immediacy and veracity by constantly breaking down the boundaries between fiction and reality (even to the extent of appearing within the film as its director, commenting on its action, and having the actress conduct real interviews with real passers-by). The spectator is thus confronted with the need to redefine the concept of reality in his own life.



THE CONFORMIST

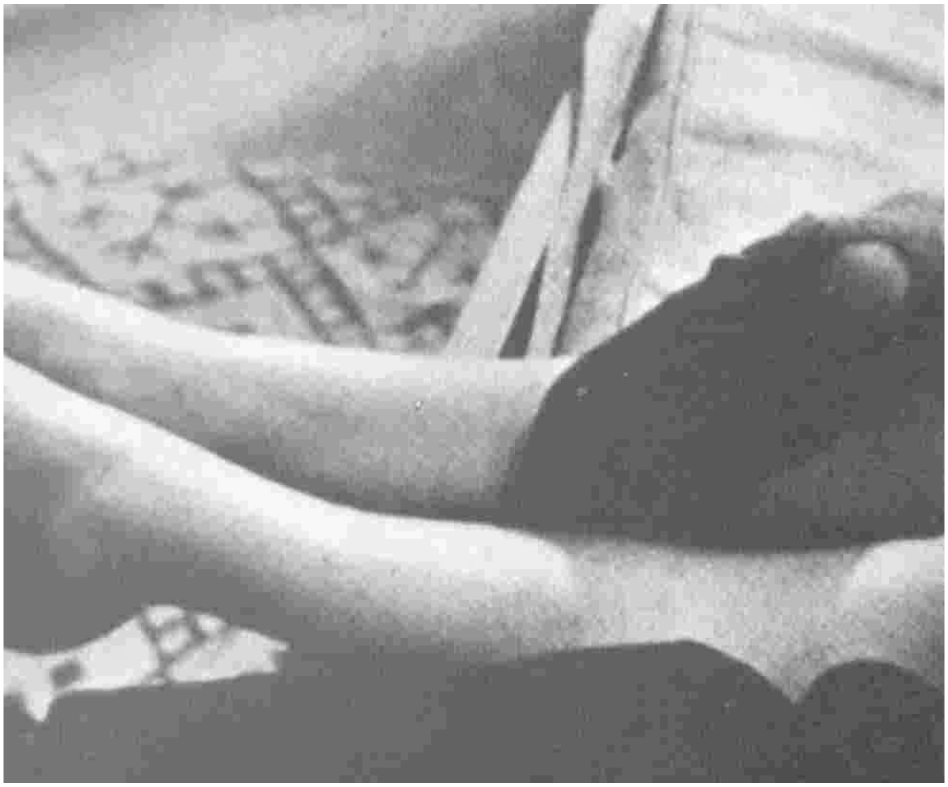
(Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970) (F)

The subtlety of composition, decor, and atmosphere within a single shot denotes the presence of a master. The time is the 30s, revealed in dress, wallpaper, style of couch. The slanting rays of the sun add to the pent-up erotic tension of a moment soon to erupt in a sexual encounter on the floor. SC

KODAK LOVE POEMS

(Andre Noren, USA, 1970) (F)

Excellent example of the autobiographical, "diary" type of personal cinema, this is an intense evocation, in rapid flash frames, of erotic episodes and memories. There is no continuity except that of sex; nothing is withheld. Pans, rapid cuts, zooms, and superimpositions further "complicate" these free-flowing memory traces, following no ordered or preconceived patterns. Cats, apartment interiors, passing pedestrians, a storm, mingle with the many and mysterious occupations of human love, shown head-on, in snatches; a record of acts and feelings on film. Unlike commercial pornography, the intention here is revelatory and personal; only censors will fail to notice the difference.



BELLE DE JOUR

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1966)

What a master can show by showing almost nothing. The man's aggressive intention is clearly implied, as is the woman's "resistance" (her legs still closed, though lying quietly). She seems well-dressed, he has a hole in his sock. Compositional lines, though strongly geometric and at ninety degree angles, are tilted, increasing the shot's dynamism. As usual, Bunuel seems preoccupied with feet. SC

ORANGE

(Karen Johnson, USA, 1969)

Quite appropriately a prizewinner at the 1970 International Erotic Film Festival, this closeup of the peeling, sectioning, licking, and eating of a navel orange becomes a sensuous, sexual experience that disturbs and attracts by the ambivalence of its images; erotic associations constantly impinge.

QUIET DAYS IN CLICHY

(Jens Jorgen Thorsten, Denmark, 1970)

Henry Miller's memoir of friends, women, and cheap wine is a relaxed, very sexy outrage that manages to be both humorous and pornographic. Genitals and "penetration" are shown and a particularly anti-bourgeois scene has the starving Miller flavor a cookie from a garbagecan with odor derived from his anus. SC

PSYCHOMONTAGE

(Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen, USA, 1960?)

Sexologists, psychologists, and proponents of sexual freedom, the Kronhausens here attempt to induce erotic response in the audience by carefully chosen visual stimuli and juxtapositions (aimed at both conscious and unconscious). Phallic symbols and open orifices, a tongue licking an orange, an unexpected finger entering the frame: almost any object or act, no matter how innocuous, the Kronhausens show, can be made to appear erotic, and reveals our predisposition towards "shaping" visual evidence for purposes of erotic gratification.

SCHOOLGIRL

(David Reberg, USA, 1971) (F)

American "hardcore" productions turns on the "research" done by a California college girl for her paper on "sexual sub-cultures".

Answering kinky ads in the underground press, she meets a couple for a *menage a trois* (and while performing fellatio on the husband, is asked by the wife to "move her hair out of her face" so that she can watch better. She then lets herself be told by a man on the other end of a phone how to masturbate and to describe it to him at the same time; we see him masturbate as well, until both simultaneously come "by telephone". Several adventures later, she finally delivers her paper: "Their sex life is awful and alienated ... I never participated but only observed from an academic viewpoint." More than most, this film approaches erotic realism; despite its blatant commercialism it shows red pimples on buttocks, scratches on legs, penises that fall out amidst gales of laughter, chirping birds, ejaculations into a girl's mouth on-camera. The protagonists are "doing their thing" without hesitation. Significantly, the two constants are the telephone (dangerous tool of a technological age) that here spins a web of corruption; and fellation, with which every sex act in the film begins.

SECRETS OF LIFE

(Victor Faccinto, USA, 1971)

Quite properly, unsympathetic critics refer to this as a "filthy" cartoon. Using intentionally naive cut-out figures and a crude, slashing style of graphics and action, this is a sophisticated, garish work of pop art. A driving tempo propells the viewer through images of violence and pornographic sex. The underlying pain is unmistakable.

SEX

(David Avidan, Israel, 1971)

The image is universal; the country of origin is Israel, confirming that its young are not different from others elsewhere. The atmosphere is cool, modern, Western; the decor ulitarian, the style avant-garde. Nothing detracts from the soft abandon of the scene. This film is banned in Israel.

And who said that Israel cannot make sex films? Yet the contrasting myths of Israel as an idealistic society given to righteous self-improvement or a militarist-orthodox state bent on self-aggrandizement are so strong that this work comes as a surprise. Its manifold copulations, sophisticated stance, avant-garde modernity, and political thrusts stamp it as the testimony of a new generation. One sequence: "A vision of the Virgin Mary waiting for the Holy Ghost to do his thing, as Avidan's voice sings a tearful Yiddish refrain and Joseph the Carpenter bangs on the door, before going to take his vengeance by building a cross."

ROOM SERVICE 75

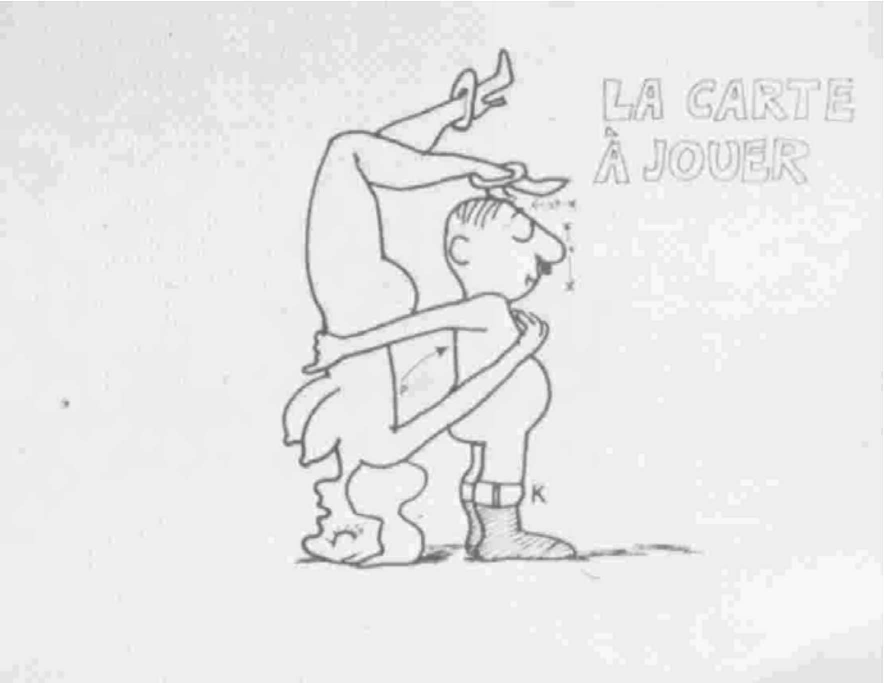
(Fred Baker, USA, 1971)

The modern "hardcore" film -- though light years ahead of the commercial cinema in terms of sex -- does not consist of an unbroken series of coupling organs; elements of subtlety and aesthetics are beginning to invade it. The rug, the very anonymity of the performers, the camera angle, and professional photography indicate that art is not far away.

SHADOW OF AN APPLE

(Robert Lapoujade, France, 1965?)

We owe the eminent French painter -- turned filmmaker -- this most lyrical and poetic portrayal of sex yet attempted in animated cinema. Based on the story of Leda and the swan, the constant transmogrifications of subtle, erotic images project an atmosphere of desperate, elemental, endless sex that is both liberating and disturbing.



KAMA SUTRA RIDES AGAIN

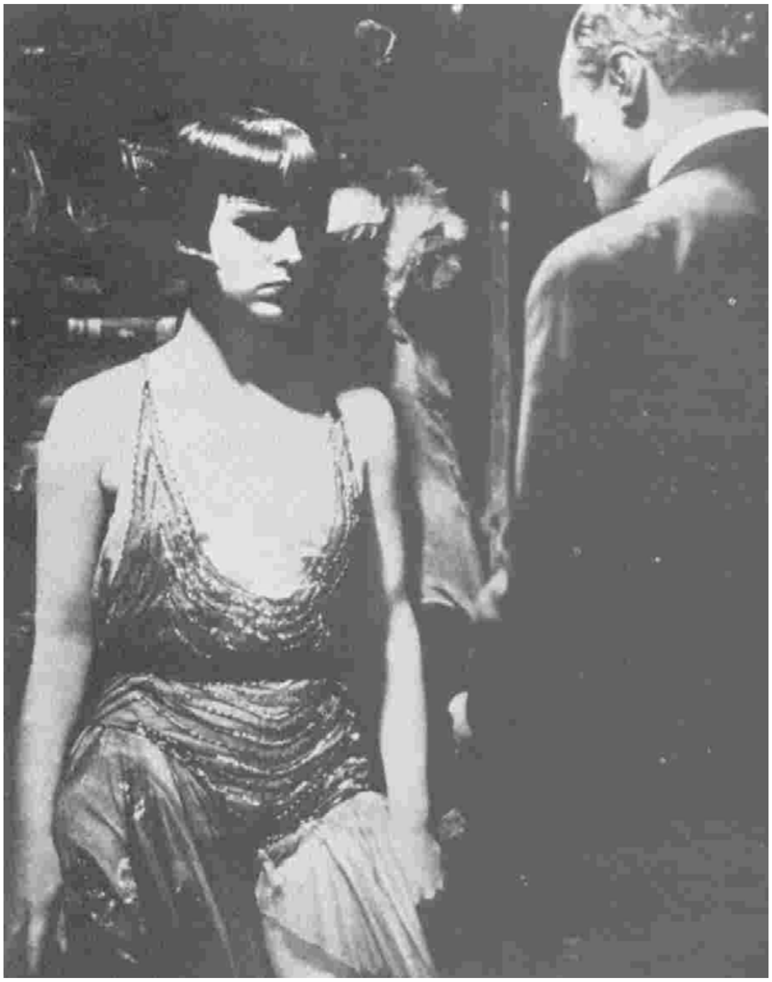
(Bob Godfrey, Great Britain, 1971)

Certain structural difficulties seem implicit in this new sex position (one of many), propounded in a tongue-in-cheek sex manual by one of the most talented international animators.

TALES

(Cassandra Gerstein, USA, 1970) (F)

A curious, controversial film (produced by an all-woman crew), consisting entirely of "tales" of sexual adventures (or fantasies) told by a group of youngish New Yorkers gathered in an apartment. One story prompts the next; the atmosphere is informal; the result -- a censorable, liberating example of verbal eroticism, quite shocking in its impact. It is the very absence of descriptive image and the ability secretly to observe "real" people freely recalling erotic experiences, that accounts for the film's effect: but the eroticism unquestionably also flows -- non-verbally -- from the faces, hesitations, and gestures of the individual participants.



PANDORA'S BOX

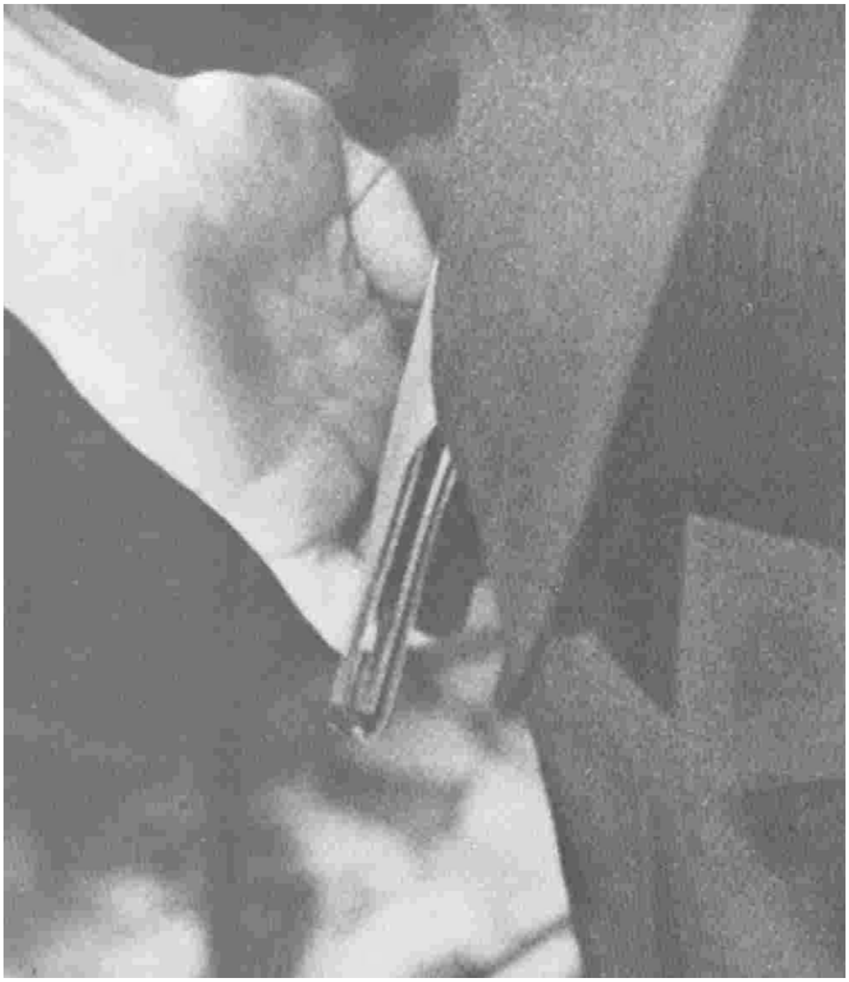
(G.W. Pabst, Germany, 1928) (F)

Louise Brooks, one of the most erotic actresses of world cinema in one of her most erotic roles. Her sullen, volatile sexuality is reinforced by the deep, expressionist shadows on face and neck as against the provocative lighting of her body. The entire frame area is crowded in tight compositional design, reflecting the erotic tension which this confrontation of (anonymous) male and arousing female exudes.

A STRANGER KNOCKS

(Johan Jacobsen, Denmark, 1963) (F)

A censorship landmark case: the entire plot pivots on an act of intercourse, during which the woman accidentally discovers the vital clue to the film's mystery. The complete absence of nudity and total revelance of the scene to the plot posed an impossible problem for the American censors, and led, upon appeals against its prohibition, to the abolition of the Supreme Court of the entire system of American state censorship in 1967. This development contributed significantly to the later era of sexual permissiveness in the American cinema.



PICKPOCKET

(Robert Bresson, France, 1958)

The erotic intensity of the act of stealing has never been more poignantly revealed than in this film; the poetic montages, outlining techniques of theft in wordless, fluid succession, are memorable visual triumphs. As usual, Bresson's extreme visual economy and directness hides a hallucinatory reality; the sexual implications of forcibly removing another person's "valuables" by close -- yet, significantly, only symbolic -- contact with him.

TAKE ME

(Stephen Dwoskin, Great Britain, 1969)

For thirty minutes, a girl attempts to seduce the viewer (the camera) by provocative movements and kisses, becoming progressively more covered with paint until the seduction "succeeds". An intense, sadly masturbatory *tour de force* by England's most iconoclastic independent.

WEEKEND

(Jean-Luc Godard, France, 1968)

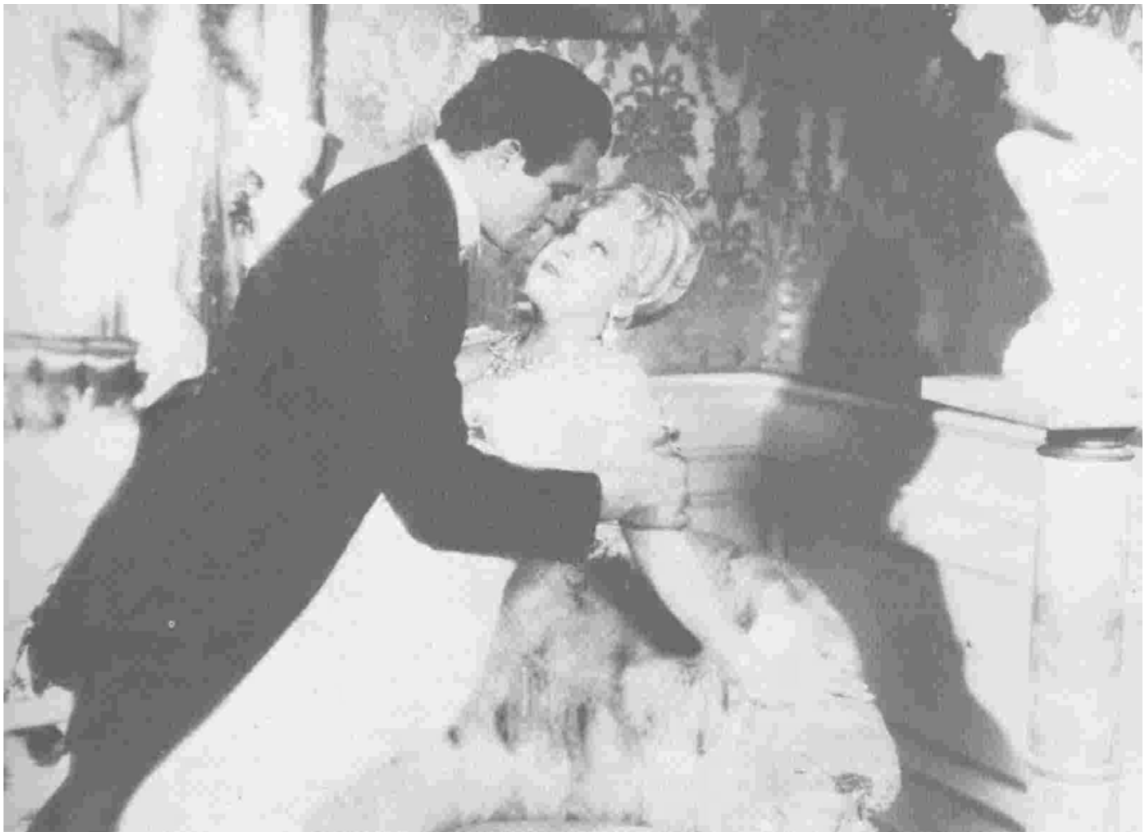
Verbal pornography as art -- by Godard. The woman, her face deeply shadowed, recounts very specific sexual memories while the male (analyst?) listens impassively. There is little movement or action; yet the sequence is drenched in eroticism, to which the girl's pose and attire (and the presence of a male) contribute. SC

WHAT GOES ON AT SEX THERAPY CLINICS

(Community Medical Cablecasting, USA, 1972)

An example of the twilight status presently enjoyed by American cable television: not yet large enough to be a "threat" to law and order, yet sufficiently widespread to be seen by considerable audiences. On the same television set on which the commercial networks impose the most onerous censorship of visual materials. Community Medical Cablecasting presents films for doctors which, however, are available to all cable-TV subscribers. The film under discussion presents a middle-aged, middle-class couple, comfortably ensconced in a bourgeois doctor's office, listening to two smiling sexologists outline a carefully graduated program to correct the man's premature ejaculation; the wife is to masturbate him three times a night until immediately prior to ejaculation and then to stop; only the fourth time should she bring him to climax. Moans and groans are encouraged. Erection and penetration are freely discussed and an air of smiling gentility and earnest rationalism never

disappears from proceedings unprecedented for American television.



SHE DONE HIM WRONG
(Lowell Sherman, USA, 1933) (F)
Sex Then: this shot was once considered daring. It touches upon the act and skirts it; titillation is rampant. The male appears as agressor, but the female (note calculating glance) has helped induce her sweet predicament. The sexes are apart, wear masks, and are submerged by heavily "erotic" decor; they are clearly defined as actors.

UNFOLDING

(Constance Beeson, USA, 1969)

Sex Now: The masks are off, as are the clothes; these are people, not actors; titillation is gone and lust is accompanied by warmth and tenderness. Two pairs of hands create a circle. This lyrical work -- significantly, one of the few erotic films ever made by women -- progresses from foreplay to explicit sex, proving that even "hardcore" sequences can be subverted into dealing with feelings rather than mechanics.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

SATYRICON

(Federico Fellini, France/Italy, 1969) (F)

Fellini's uncanny ability to establish character visually: the jaded world-wise corruption of one who has seen all and will soon die, the child-like perversion of boys used as sex objects. Though not looking at each other, the three are visually and psychologically linked. SC

THE END OF SEXUAL TABOOS: HOMOSEXUALITY AND OTHER VARIANTS - PART ONE

However taboo-ridden conventional heterosexual practices may be

in cinema, the portrayal of sexual variations -- homosexuality, sado-masochism, masturbation, bestiality, oral sex, coprophilia -- has been even more difficult. Though their range is as wide as psysiological structure and psychological preference permit, and their existence from the dawn of time a tribute to the power of sex, even film "liberals" commonly consider them to be beyond the pale of pictorial representation. This is because unconsciously, they -- like the conservatives -- do not accept these variations but still view them as aberrations or corruptions and refuse to remove the guilt imposed upon those who enjoy them. The only valid criterion in sexual matters, however, would seem to be an injunction against hurting others; otherwise, the sex instinct is indifferent to the particular "mechanical" process employed, the choice of partner or sex. Hence the "hedonistic" (that is, human) conclusion, that everything is permissible, provided it pleases. This sexual permissiveness -- certainly destructive of established mores -- has been an aspect of the ideology of the avant-garde from its inception. For this movement is forever at war with society and its values.

HOLDING

(Constance Beeson, USA, 1971)

As in her earlier *Unfolding*, this woman filmmaker stresses feeling and emotion within the sexual experience. Here the sweet charm and almost child-like innocence of two young lesbian girls is revealed in an unforced and informal pose. All sexual experiences are

here accepted as valid, subject to the same joys and trials.

HOMOSEXUALITY

This is why "serious" homosexual cinema begins with the underground, forever ahead of the commercial cinema and setting it goals which though initially viewed as outrageous, are later partly absorbed by it. Kenneth Anger, Curtis Harrington, Jean Genet, Stan Brakhage, Andy Warhol, and Paul Morrissey are pioneers in indicating the possibility of sex, tenderness, or love between members of the same sex.

In the commercial cinema, the portrayal of the homosexual has moved through well-defined, if ridiculous, stages; his invisibility, his elimination, his transformation into something slightly less offensive (such as a Jew), his having to die a difficult death or commit suicide, and later, actual hints of his "odious" activities and sniggering or circumscribed acceptance.

With the passing of Hollywood's pre-eminence, not only are homosexuals more freely portrayed in commercial films, but a large number of explicit homosexual films are made for public showings, some by hacks, others by artists. In 1973, there existed in New York at least a dozen hardcore homosexual cinemas.

Significantly, lesbian hardcore films continue to be made by men and are designed for the male sex market. Except for those of Constance Beeson, hardly any lesbian films are made from a woman's viewpoint. This lends credence to Kinsey's findings that women are generally less involved with pictorial sex than men, though this would appear to be conditioned by cultural factors.

"AKTION SS AND STAR OF DAVID",
from THE LASCIVIOUS WOTAN
(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1971)
The bad conscience of the German displayed in the ultimate sexual fantasy, combining the brutality of the Nazi SS (significantly enacted by Muehl on the left and helper) with the defenseless attractiveness of the victimized Jewess already tattooed with the symbol no German can exorcise.

OTHER VARIATIONS

Judging by current commercial exhibition -- and omitting only the hardcore houses operating in a few countries -- hardly any of the sexual variations exist in film at all.

Oral sex -- though engaged in, according to Kinsey, by more than half the population (with others undoubtedly not admitting to it) -- is not yet portrayed in regular commercial cinema, though cleverly implied. It forms the largest single item in the entire output of world hardcore cinema, ranking ahead even of intercourse: a tribute to the power of this particular taboo.

As of 1973, intercourse with animals remains the one variety of sex hardly ever seen in America, even in the "hardcore" movie houses, due to fear of police action. Scandinavian films of this type, though freely shown in their countries of origin, cannot, at

the time of writing, be imported into the United States due to customs censorship. This did not, however, prevent at least half of the adolescent rural population of America from engaging in this practice, according to Kinsey, that master subversive.

Since devotees of necrophilia, by all indications, constitute only a tiny portion of the populace, the commercial film industry sees no reason to cater to them and is prepared to forego their patronage for fear of retaliation by its regular customers. While this does not eliminate fictional necrophilia (particularly in certain low-grade horror films), "cinema verite" necrophilia has been impossible to record. Unlike "straight" hardcore productions, no volunteers come forward to appear as actors, inert partners are difficult to find, while bright lights and unruly camera crews would certainly "distort" the realism of the act. This, then, remains one of the unconquered areas of liberated cinema.

Late arrivals even in sexually permissive films have been ejaculation and sperm. Previously available only as microscopic samples in scientific films -- where they were less threatening and easier to "contain" -- their explosive reality has only lately invaded hardcore films, with coitus intentionally interrupted to display to the audience the true passion of the actor. Messy-looking and somehow "deplorable" even to many sexual liberals, the ejaculate is altogether too fundamental for comfortable viewing; its color and size make it difficult to photograph under the primitive lighting conditions usually prevailing in such films; and the total output (when objectively viewed on the screen) has always been negatively disproportional to the great passion and exertion displayed in the earlier stages of the act. Except for special palates, then, the cinematic portrayal of ejaculation has not proven to be a potent sexual stimulant.

FILMS

THE QUEEN

(Frank Simon, USA, 1968)

Haunting and knowing looks, a bulge in
the wrong place: contestants in the annual
Miss-All-American-Drag-Queen competition,
as seen in a sharp, often moving cinema verite
film that accepts its protagonists for what
they are and what they want to be, instead
of deploring, glorifying, or ridiculing them.

THE ABONIMABLE DR. HITCHCOCK
(L'ORRIBILE SEGRETO DEL DOTTORE HITCHCOCK)

(Riccardo Freda aka Robert Hampton, Italy, 1962) (F)

Cult film for the neo-surrealists,
this gory and shadowy work recounts
the adventures of a proud necrophiliac,
accepting the practice as "given" and
passing no moral judgement except
that implicit in his fiery death.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

(Billy Wilder, USA, 1958) (F)

The Hollywood view of transvestitism: it must be portrayed flippantly or in jest to be acceptable. The titillation is built-in and sells tickets. Any serious portrayal would be considered "in poor taste" and beyond the pale.

BELLE DE JOUR

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1966) (F)

While the very premises of this work are doubly subversive -- the inhibited bourgeois woman's secret wish to prostitute herself, the repeated shattering of the film's illusionism -- it is, in addition, deliberately shot through with shock images hinting at sexual abberations: sad0-masochism, necrophilic masturbation, blood on a sheet after sex, a Japanese "customer" with a mysterious box, of which the whores are afraid. All of these are the more disturbing for being left unexplained. Bunuel, the master subversive, thereby compels us to supply our own sexual tension, desires, and fears. SC

THE BLOODTHIRSTY FAIRY
(LA FEE SANGUINAIRE)

(Roland Lethum, Belgium, 1968)

A voluptuous nude fairy attacks law, order, and religion by choking a nun with her cross (first

arousing her by fonding her breasts), beating a uniformed official, gouging out a boy's eyes for threatening her with a toy gun (she licks off her bloody fingers afterwards), and, finally, methodically castrating a student because he studies law. A pan along a shelf reveals the meticulously bottled penises of Diem, Martin Luther King, Kennedy, Johnson, and De Gaulle. At the end, two angels deliver her in a barrel to a new destination: the Belgian Royal Palace. The swastika that opened the film changes into Nixon.

THE CONFORMIST

(Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970)

The protagonist, shown as a young boy, remembers a near-homosexual encounter. The bed, the innocence (?) of the near-child (arousing the man by his playful touch), the watchful, sensual anticipation of Clementi, the positioning of the boy between the man's legs create an air of incipient sexuality. Decor and boots (contrasted with the boy's snappy school uniform) stamp Clementi as lower class. SC

THE CONFORMIST

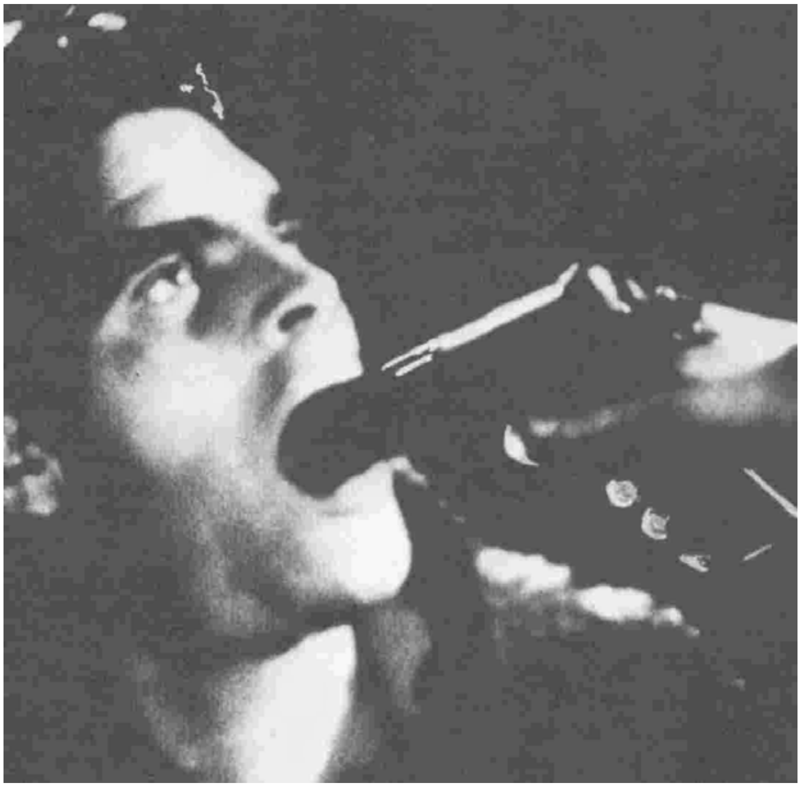
(Bernardo Bertolucci, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970)

A strangely funereal lesbian scene. Enough acceptable nudity is shown to make it enticing, though strategic areas are blocked out to avoid censorship; it did not help -- this scene was widely cut. A slight camera tilt shifts the composition to the right where its main interest indeed lies. SC

BLOW JOB

(Andy Warhol, USA, 1963/64)

Daring in subject matter and technique, this early Warhol film records a 36 minute closeup of a handsome young man's face, as an invisible "other" (out of camera range) performs fellatio on him. Nothing is seen except the face and a brick wall beyond; as we study it, mesmerized, we feel the pain of passion, the on-off tease of lust, the quickening tempo, the orgasm, the sad, somehow empty afterglow. The camera does not move; the act, reflected, exists for itself; there is no message. SC



UN CHANT D'AMOUR

(Jean Genet, France, 1950)

In an erotic fantasy, a frustrated prison guard rams his gun down a prisoner's throat. The strong visual concentration on gun and mouth by close-up, lighting, and positioning within frame (including the gun's dynamic downward tilt) reflects Genet's emphasis on oral sex.

Genet's only film -- hounded by the censors, unavailable, secret -- is an early and remarkably moving attempt to portray homosexual passions. Already a classic, it succeeds as perhaps no other film to intimate the explosive power of frustrated sex; male prisoners in solitary confinement "embracing" walls, ramming them in erotic despair with erect penis, swaying convulsively to aut0-erotic lust, kissing their own bodies and tattoes in sexual frenzy. In a supremely poetic (and visual) metaphor of sexual deprivation, two prisoners in adjoining cells symbolically perform fellatio by alternately blowing or inhaling each other's cigarette smoke through a straw inserted in a wall opening, while masturbating. Like all of Genet's early work, the entire film is, in effect, a single onanistic fantasy, filled with desperate frustration and sensuous nostalgia. In the end, and after many failures, some flowers -- painfully passed from one barred window to the next -- are finally caught by the prisoner in the adjoining cell in a poetic affirmation of love in infinite imprisonment.

BUT DO NOT DELIVER US FROM EVIL (MAIS NE NOUS DELIVEREZ PAS DU MAL)

(Joel Seria, France, 1971) (F)

This bleak work has been banned in France as "catering to perversion and fomenting moral and mental destruction". It is the story of two upper-class nymphets awakening sexually in the oppressive atmosphere of a parochial French school who decide "to do evil, just as the others, the imbeciles, do good." They pass from denouncing lesbian nuns to torturing animals to casual murder. Finally, onstage to recite poetry during a school ceremony, they douse themselves with gasoline and go up in flames.

CYBELE

(Donald Ritchie, Japan, 1968)

Having bitten off some penises and asphyxiated their owners, the young woman rests happily. Birds sing. A scene from a "pastoral ritual", directed by a noted film authority much influenced by Western avant-garde and Japanese erotic cinema.

"A pastoral ritual in five scenes", set in a deserted Japanese tomb-ground: convocation of the nude males, invocation of the nude female, abjuration (in which she places burning

incense sticks between their buttocks and is fucked), retribution (she ties their erect penises with a string and pulls them behind her), and apotheosis, in which she bites them off, asphyxiates their owners by straddling their heads, and introduces sticks into their anuses until they emerge from their mouths. Finally, she lies down on the bodies and smiles happily. Birds sing. An extraordinarily uncompromising avant-garde film.

EMPEROR TOMATO KETCHUP

(Shuji Terayama, Japan, 1972) (F)

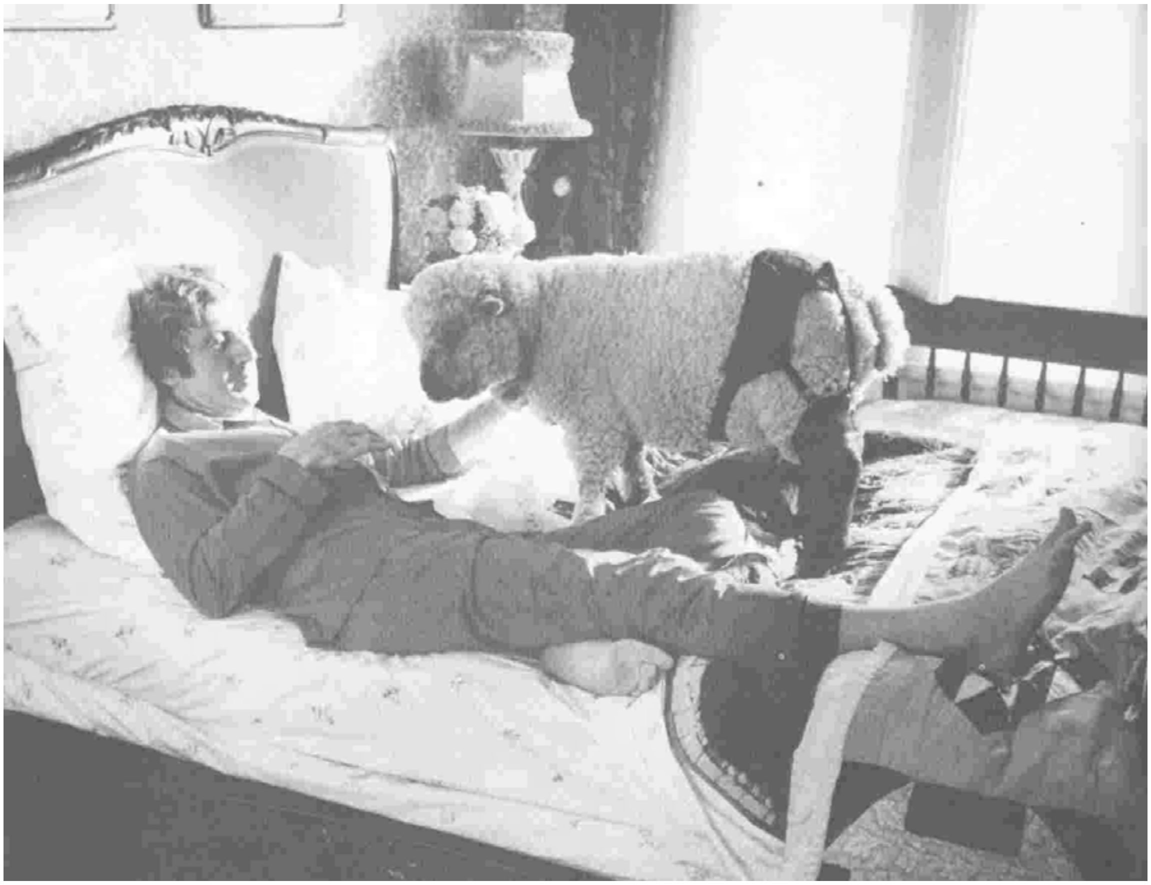
The use of children in (however simulated) sex acts with adults is always shocking; in this "scandalous" avant-garde film, magical women act as their initiatory, yet protectively maternal partners. The children, in revolt, have condemned their parents to death for depriving them of self-expression and sexual freedom; they create a society in which fairies and sex education are equally important and, as seen here, literally combinable.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1971) (F)

Despite its stylized penises and vaginas, its attack on a future fascism, its raw and kinky sex, the actual subversion of this curious work is weakened by ideological ambiguity, an inexplicable failure to "carry through" its ironic surrealism, and an unconscious attitude towards violence so complex that it serves to glamorize what it means to

deplore. By his unexpected post-release agreement to remove sexually- too-explicit material (in order to change the Hollywood film industry's "X" rating and thereby gain a larger audience), Kubrick unintentionally poses the question whether these scenes had been put into the original film for shock value rather than out of artistic necessity and undercuts the ideological basis of the film. SC



EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX, BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK

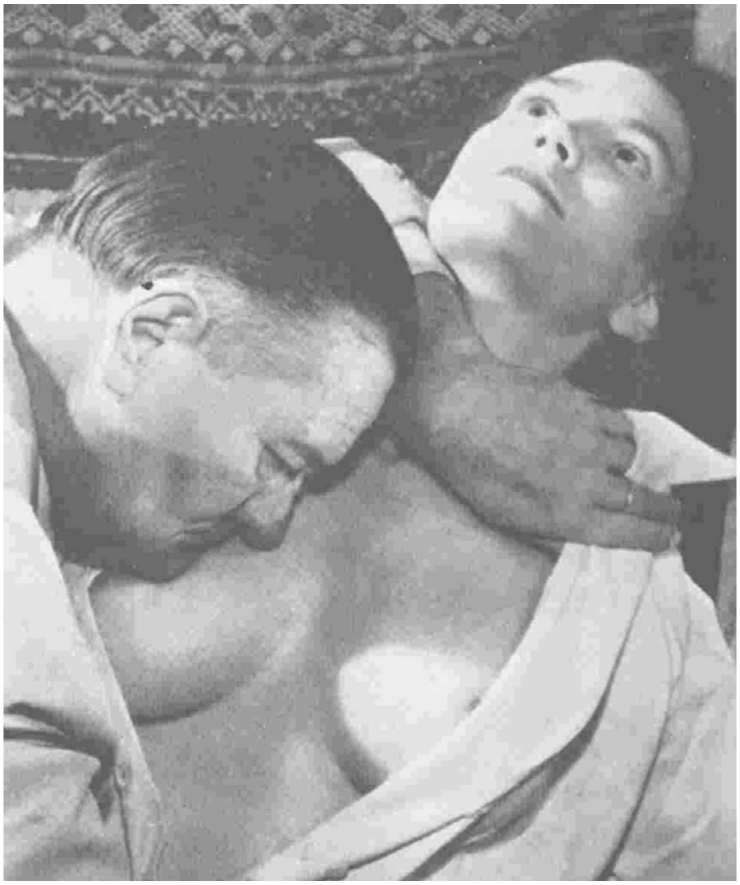
(Woody Allen, USA, 1972) (F)

The "gentle" genius of Woody Allen -- one of the few major comic talents to emerge in the last decade -- masks an insidious and sardonic imagination that continually chips away at taboos. Only he could get away with portraying a sexual relationship between a man and a sheep in a commercial film, and then heighten its "perverse obscenity" by making it appear entirely "normal". Here a hotel room has been rented for a tete-a-tete with the sheep. The most notorious aspect of the still is, of course, the sheep's "seductive" attire.

LE DEPART

(Jerzy Skolimowski, Belgium, 1967) (F)

It seems easier to outwit the censors with fellatio than with intercourse. In this visually brilliant comedy of sexual initiation, Jean Pierre Leaud is seen through the windshield driving a car, while an eager middle-aged woman next to him suddenly slides from her seat and disappears for a considerable time. As he tries hard to drive in a straight line, she nonchalantly reappears and resumes conversation. Absurd and surrealist situations abound in this Godardesque work.



LES IMPURES

(Pierre Chevalier, France, 1954)

In our day, there is nothing particularly wrong about the action in this still -- except that the woman is dead. Both the man -- now seen in tragic resignation, not merely lust -- and the position of the woman's body draw us from the breasts to the real center of the action: her eyes.

DIARY OF A SHINJUKU BURGLAR (SHINJUKU DOROBO NIKKI)

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1968/69) (F)

A grotesque, erotic, ultimately phantasmagorical avant-garde work, in which a young couple engage in a bizarre search for sexual ecstasy, while Tokyo explodes in student riots. In several scenes, cinematic taboos are casually dispensed with: the capitalist wiping his hand after fondling his secretary, the thief who almost ejaculates while shoplifting, the couple walking down a night-lit Tokyo street with a dildo swinging from a string between them, until she, imploring, lies down on the pavement for him.

THE EMBRYO

(Koji Wakamatsu, Japan, 1966) (F)

Japanese sex cinema seems somewhat more oriented toward "kinky" sex and sado-masochism. This shot disturbs because of its emphasis on rope and the girl's well-lit, bound wrists: we distrust the man's gentle ministrations. A surrealist anti-American demonstration at the 1968 Knokke Experimental Film Festival combined huge, Cinemascope-width images of this girl systematically violated by a razor with 50 live Maoists on stage screaming that this is what America is doing to Vietnam.

FIREWORKS

(Kenneth Anger, USA, 1947)

An early classic of the homosexual cinema and probably one of the most famous American avant-garde films. A painfully honest, deeply-felt episode of sado-masochist

homosexuality, experienced as nightmare and wish-dream, in which the protagonist (played by Anger) is brutally attacked and disembowelled by a group of sailors. In the last scene, he opens his fly and "lights" his penis which explodes in firework fashion. Intensity, pain, and poetic imagery transform autobiographical elements into art. **SC**

FLAMING CREATURES

(Jack Smith, USA, 1962)

Frequently banned, this notorious American avant-garde work is a curiously joyless compendium of uncertain, polymorphously perverse sex episodes -- a succession of penises, rapes, orgies, masturbation, and oral sex. The style, quite intentionally, hovers between "camp" satire and genuine pain, as a cast of flaming transvestites and voluptuous women cavort in exaggerated costumes (or none) amidst luxuriant, over-exposed sets, fondling each other's large breasts and limp penises to the doleful accompaniment of scratchy bull-fight or Chinese music, "Siboney", and assorted sentimental hits. Perhaps a nostalgic, subjective dream evocation of a mythological Hollywood, it succeeds in being both intentionally amateurish and shocking. **SC**

VIRIDIANA

(Luis Bunuel, Spain/Mexico, 1961)

A scene of sadness and death amidst orderly surroundings. But this is Bunuel, and this charmingly cultivated bourgeois necrophiliac is about to have intercourse with a fantasy: the former nun he has dressed as a bride, drugged, and now aranges like the corpse he wants her to be for sex. SC

FLESH OF MORNING

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1956)

The "subversion" of this film lies in its use of masturbation as central plot device. Visually, however, the act is not fully shown, though the passion of the moment -- the heaving of the body, the hard breathing is conveyed in Brakhage's technique of splintering the image, creating a semi-abstract, cubist collage of parts of bodies, close-ups, sudden unidentifiable movements.

FRAGMENT OF SEEKING

(Curtis Harrington, USA, 1946)

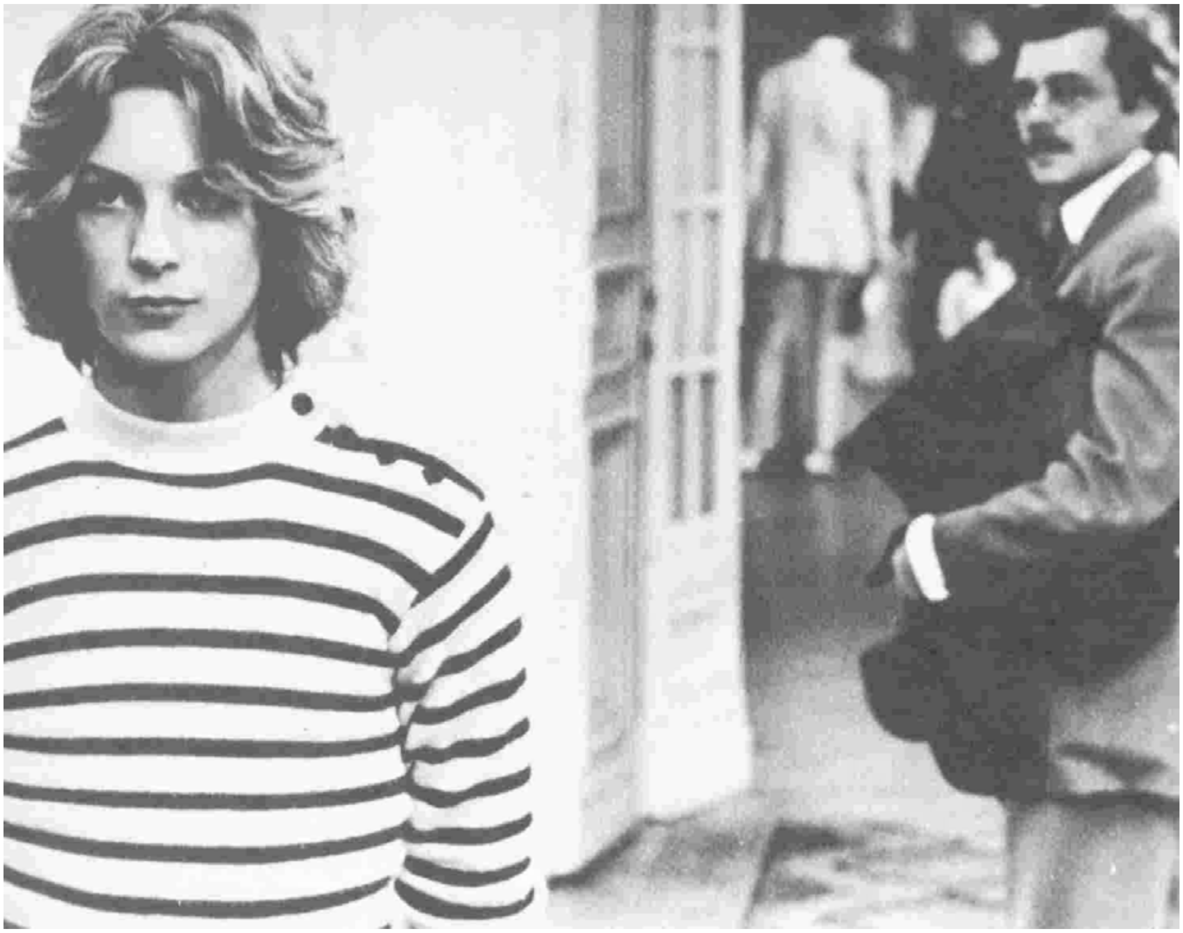
Simplicity of form and honesty of feeling characterize this early, still valid work of poetic self-realization. The protagonist (the filmmaker and later, Hollywood director) searches, amidst mounting tension, for the object of his desire. In the last scene, it is revealed: himself, as a girl.

DEATH IN VENICE
(MORTE A VENEZIA)

(Luschino Visconti, Italy, 1971) (F)

The apotheosis of the old cinema, beautifully composed and photographed, this is a perfect evocation of period and atmosphere, an elegy of melancholy and remorse. At the same time, it constitutes a diminution of the sublime complexity of Thomas Mann's novel to the dimensions of a homosexual fantasy. Without resorting to a single sex scene, or even the barest touch of nudity, Visconti has fashioned a romantic, deeply felt rendition of homosexual emotions, their intensity equalled only by certain sequences in Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour*.

The compulsive recurrence of scenes of carnal desire and utter frustration -- the passion of an old man for a nubile boy -- assumes the proportions of tragedy and is reinforced by Mahler's sumptuous score. SC



DEATH IN VENICE
(MORTE A VENEZIA)
(Luschino Visconti, Italy, 1971) (F)

Without a single sex scene, nudity, or even the barest touch, Visconti creates a deeply-felt rendition of an older man's frustrated passion for a boy. The man, appropriately, has already entered the shadows (he dies at the end): the new generation faces us seductively, bisexually. The door frame separates what must not come together. SC

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

HOMOSEXUALITY & OTHER VARIANTS - PART TWO

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

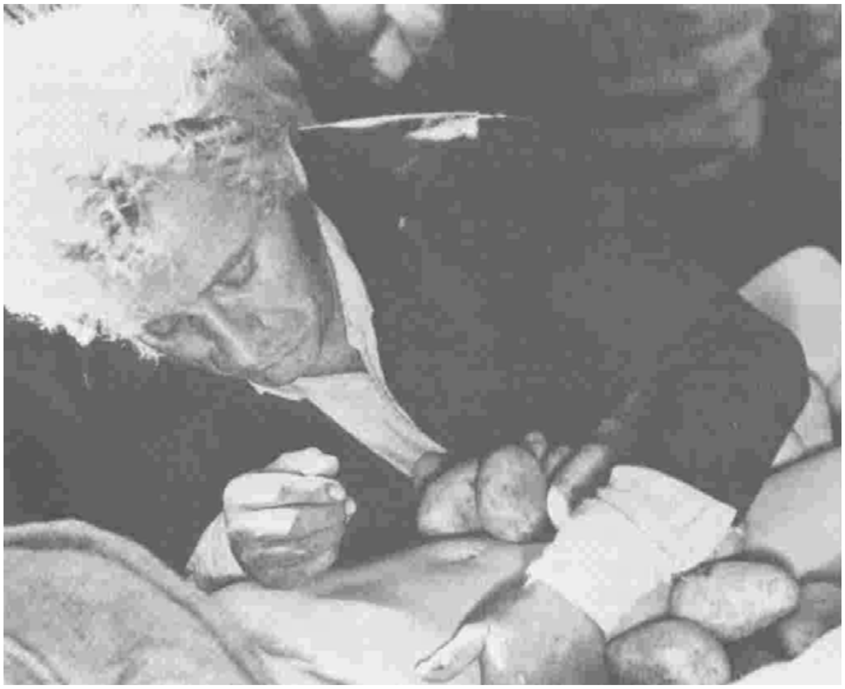
FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

THE DAMNED

(Luschino Visconti, Italy/West Germany, 1969) (F)

It is dangerous and popular to equate Nazi fascism with sexual "perversion" though Visconti has historic facts (the homosexual scandal in the SA) to back him up. The film is apocalyptic, the image shocking, and even incest is brought in to complete the facile indictment of a popular reality by means of a sexual metaphor. SC

THE END OF SEXUAL TABOOS: HOMOSEXUALITY AND OTHER VARIANTS - PART TWO



FRENZY

(Alfred Hitchcock, Great Britain, 1971) (F)

The nude corpse, inundated by potatoes; the murderer, determined and desperate; and dead fingers that must be broken to retrieve the tell-tale clue. Kinky sex and kinky eating are the two constants of this Hitchcock tale.

"Frenzy" exhibits curiously parallel symptoms of professional "mastery" and inner emptiness. This is one of Hitchcock's most successful recent films, a splendid throwback almost to the great works of his earlier, British period. A variation on the Jack-the-Ripper theme, it allows him to take advantage of the new cinematic permissiveness by introducing gory sex murders, nudity, and two Hitchcock "firsts": pubic hair and the fondling of breasts. It is also one of his kinkiest films. The most sensational sequence involves the attempted retrieval by the murderer of the tell-tale clue (his tie clip) from the victim's corpse, hidden under bushels of potatoes in a wildly careering truck; he is finally compelled (with appropriate sound effects) one by one to break the rigid fingers of his delicious corpse. The tension, tempo, editing, and camerawork are superb; but the afterglow induces a *deja vu*. Perhaps the film can be appreciated only as a highly-mannered, commercial entertainment, a *tour de force* by a master craftsman whose implicit anti-bourgeois stance -- "nothing is what it seems to be in this most rational of all worlds" -- long ago "mellowed" into bourgeois titillation.

THE SERVANT

(Joseph Losey, Great Britain, 1963) (F)

An air of evil and corruption permeates one of Losey's strangest films. In this scene, erotic effects are achieved solely by hints, lighting, composition, and our own associations. The still is as evasive and as stimulating as the sequence itself. The script is by Pinter.

HEAT

(Paul Morrisey, USA, 1972) (F)

A bizarre, yet mild version of "Sunset Boulevard" a la Warhol, with a bevy of voracious females of varying proportions vying for the casual favors of a passive Joe Dallesandro. The dialogue is fresh, simple, funny, as is the relaxed, improvised acting. Fellatio and demythologized sex make their usual appearance, though -- for Morrisey -- in a curiously reserved manner. While these desperate people and their always-interrupted sex acts are perhaps too small really to engage one's concern, Morrisey's talent for a new, weird kind of naturalism (as in his *Trash*) now seems fully established. Most notably, sex is both ubiquitous and joyless, an almost inevitable chore that can neither be avoided nor really enjoyed. SC

IT IS NOT THE HOMOSEXUAL WHO IS PERVERSE, BUT THE SITUATION IN WHICH HE LIVES (NICHT DER HOMOSEXUELLE IST PERVERS, SODERN DIE SITUATION, IN DER ER LEBT)

(Rosa von Praunheim, West Germany, 1971) (F)

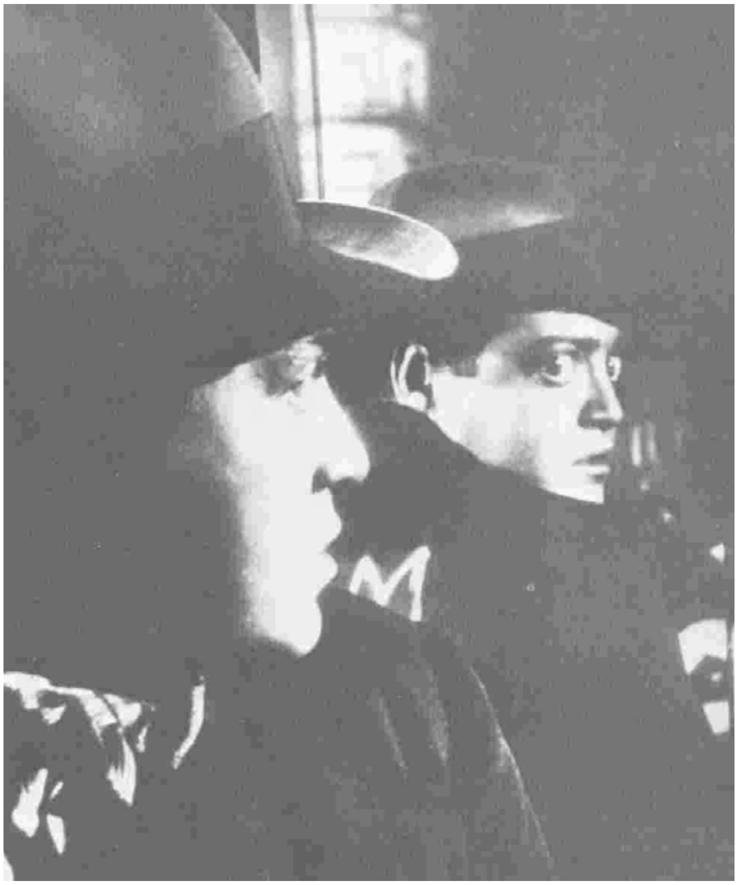
Passionate kissing between men continues as a strong taboo of commercial cinema, though it freely appears in avant-garde, independent, and, of course, gay films.

A "cinema verite" freakshow of German homosexuals, portrayed at their most giggly and melodramatic, this supposedly pro-gay film seems permeated by fire-and-brimstone puritanism and unacknowledged guilt, with several agitated narrators warning of ever-deepening "corruption" unless the gay turns to love and politics. An ambiguous morality tale, it delineates the distance between the German and American gay movements at this moment. "Rosa" von Praunheim is a male left-wing radical filmmaker. The length and documentary quality of the title (as in Costard's *The Suppression of Women Is Recognizable Above All By the Behavior Of The Women Themselves!*) denotes the anti-illusionist, anti-"art" stance of the political German avant-garde.

LOVEMAKING

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1969)

Four varieties of sexual love, as seen by the famed American avant-gardist: a young couple in explicit, lyrical, yet almost abstract embrace; dogs during foreplay, seduction, and copulation, their faces, tongues, and eyes exhibiting lust; a group of nude children frolicking on a bed in unconscious sex play, their organs almost erotic. But the most extraordinary episode involves two men performing mutual fellatio, reaching climax in mounting erotic passion; even their toes curl in involuntary tension.



M

(Fritz Lang, Germany, 1931) (F)

Peter Lorre, as a child murderer, is chased by both police and underworld, each for its own reasons; he has just been "tagged" by the underworld with the letter "M" for murderer, his identity now known. His discovery -- and simultaneous fright -- are portrayed purely visually. Lorre's immortal performance succeeded in actually evoking compassion for his sex murders over which he had no control.

MONA

(Bill Osco, USA, 1970) (F)

The incursion of hardcore sex into the commercial film market has brought with it the elevation of one of the most common, most lusted-after and most "forbidden" sex acts -- fellatio -- to the status of a profitable commodity. A 1972 newcomer to the scene, Gerard Damiano's *Deep Throat*, turned a $24,000 production budget (three days shooting in motel rooms) into a multi-million dollar profit that increased every time the police or would-be censors went after it without (at least initially) succeeding. However while this latter film -- now world-famous as the prototype of "fellatio" films -- is unique in no respect except for the impossible anatomical talents of its star, Linda Lovelace (there has never been deeper penetration anywhere) -- *Mona* must be recorded as the pioneer and in every respect a superior work. In this film, unlike *Deep Throat*, the challenge of the topic is taken seriously and the sexual activity riveted on it, as we observe the heroine in action in bedrooms, cinemas, back yards, wherever the opportunity can be created. There is an edge of abandon and desperation to her that whets the appetite of frustrated men and helps to define the film as a commercial product, in disproportionally large demand solely because society will not freely accept human activities as human.

THE MAN FROM ONAN

(Alan Ruskin, USA, 1971) (F)

A young girl gets sexually involved with her brother's sports equipment and finally rocks to a climax on a football. A scene from a rather unique hardcore feature that concentrates solely on masturbatory fantasies of women (unfortunately, as fantasized by men). The setting is very "American" (guitar, poster, baseball mitt, and slippersocks); also conveyed is a very contemporary loneliness.

One of the best of the new genre of hardcore films, this film is unique in openly pivoting on masturbation. It displays perverse originality in sequences such as the one in which a frustrated girl systematically reduces kitchen implements to onanistic tools, even to the compulsive sucking of carrot juice from a fruit extractor spout; and the sequence in which another lustful young lady gets involved with (her brother's?) baseball bat and jockstrap, and rocks to climax on a football. Though conceived as a male sex fantasy, the film succeeds, better than most, in conveying both the hunger for sex and post-orgasmic onanistic loneliness.

THE MAN FROM ONAN

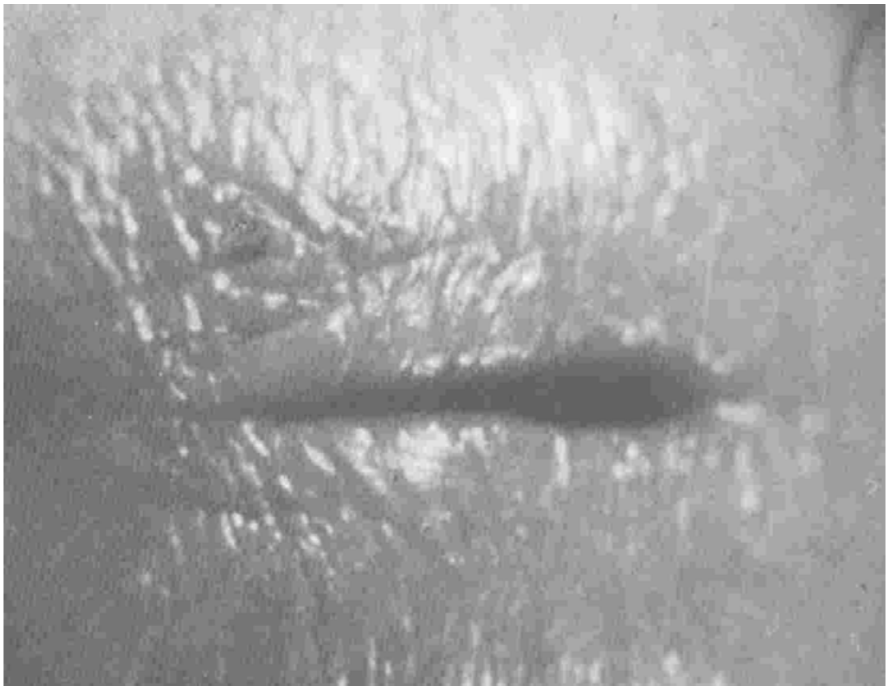
(Alan Ruskin, USA, 1971) (F)

Another sequence displays a similarly perverse originality in showing a frustrated girl's systematic reduction of kitchen implements to onanistic tools -- even to the compulsive sucking of carrot juice from a fruit juicer's spout.

MURMUR OF THE HEART (SOUFFLE AU COEUR)

(Louis Malle, France, 1971) (F)

Particularly in the context of official French puritanism, this story of European middle-class adolescence in the fifties is curiously modern and liberating in its casual treatment of sex, masturbation, and "accidental" incest, which is doubtless why the French censors recommended its total prohibition. Since it is slanted towards commercial aceptability, the film does not show sex but makes it specific by implication and dialogue; a safe and bourgeois device. Nevertheless, it has its young hero, doors locked, sit with an erotic book to masturbate; then confess this to a priest who fondles his thigh; engage in tearful fetishism with his mother's underwear after discovering her with a lover; and finally take her to bed for a brief interlude, immediately followed by a night with a young girl, his sexual education completed. "The biological justification for the incest taboo", says Malle, "has been made obsolete by the pill"; and the film, in its acceptance of sex, refuses even to hint at possible psychological difficulties.



PARTICULARLY VALUABLE (BESONDERS WERTVOLL)

(Helmuth Costard, Germany, 1968)

"Only the perverse fantasy can still save us," said Goethe to Eckermann, as quoted by the filmmaker, who promptly proceeds to outrageous filmic provocation for political ends, including these close-up shots of a "talking" penis and its subsequent ejaculation toward the camera lens. Close-ups abstractify and almost render acceptable otherwise "offensive" visuals.

Pornography in the service of politics. An outrageous provocation, this attack on reactionary German legislation discriminating against young film directors, features head-on, close-up shots of a penis "mouthing" the parliamentary defense of the law by its author. This is followed by masturbation of the organ by an anonymous female hand, ending with ejaculation into the camera and a close-up of a nude behind "blowing" out a candle (with appropriate sound). A landmark in political pamphleteering, the film was selected for the 1968 Oberhausen International Short Film Festival by a committee of leading German critics, and promptly banned by the (social-democratic!) city government, causing the withdrawal of almost all German directors from the festival and a national scandal. The title satirically refers to the official certificate of "Particularly Valuable" given each year to the best film shorts by an Establishment selection committee.

PORTRAIT OF JASON

(Shirley Clarke, USA, 1967) (F)

This moving cinema verite study by a leading American woman director consists of a feature-length interview with a Black homosexual who, despite controlled nonchalance and smiling sophistication, reveals perhaps more than intended. "A bold, incisive choreography, a dance of the human ego in all its ugly, beautiful nakedness. We see a relentless unfolding of a personality whose charm and malevolence are both irresistable and exasperating. It's like watching an emotional strip-tease, with Jason unbuttoning himself in public to reveal (or conceal) unashamedly his rascality, his conceits, his sexual hang-ups, his raggedy-assed buffoonery, his conquests and defeats -- a fascinating confessional right down to the last G-string." - Storm De Hirsch SC

SODOMA

(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1970) (F)

A scene from Otto Mueh's "happenings" evokes, in its sado-masochist horror and defilement, the evil memories (if not present realities) of a civilization of concentration camps and genocide. Franju's slaughterhouse film, *The Blood of the Beasts* -- another ideological statement of our day -- is not too far off.

The Austrian avant-gardist Otto Muehl may well be the most scandalous filmmaker working in cinema today. Whether he is also the most subversive is the subject of a continuing international debate, with even some liberal critics denouncing him as fascist, or at least, anti-humanist. But it is a grave mistake to misinterpret Muehl's work as pornographic, thereby underestimating its seditious, anarchist intent.

Muehl's films -- of which *Sodoma* is the most famous -- are based on his notorious "Materialaktionen"; live happenings, involving nude protagonists in real and extravagant acts of sexual violence and defilement. Clearly derived from dada-surrealist anti-aestheticism, these public performances predictably caused police prosecution, scandals, and near-riots in various

countries. They invade the spectator's defense mechanism and value systems in a manner comparable perhaps only to the slitting of the woman's eyeball in Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou* or Franju's deceptive documentary of the slaughter-houses, *The Blood of the Beasts*.

Muehl cannot be understood except as the product of a continent that experienced within half a century two world wars and the crushing trauma of Nazism; there is a stench of concentration camps, collective guilt, unbridled aggression, hallucinatory violence that -- however relevatory -- has the dimensions of an atavistic generalized myth of evil. If these are works of defilement -- as they surely are -- they reflect a society of defilement; they capture its essence by means of harrowing violence and perverse sexuality. To Muehl, the only way to exorcise this cruelty is by recreating it in the protected environment of theatrical space, cruelly confronting the spectator not with fraudulent, fictionalized simulations but with the act itself.

The "documentary" action recorded in *Sodoma* includes fucking, fellation, masturbation, urination, the tying or stringing up of participants (particularly women), the insertion of various fluids or objects into vaginas, pumps attached to penises; a complete demystification of sex and its portrayal as a purely physiological, bodily act.

Most shocking is the "Scheisskerl" ("Shit-Ass") episode (co-authored by Hanel Koeck), for here Muehl goes beyond hardcore sex (no longer so daring nowadays) and enters into the still forbidden realms of coprophilia. ("This film is dedicated to shit eaters.") As one nude woman administers an enema to another, a man lying beneath her waits, with open mouth; not for long. Gagging under the sudden riches, his nude body is lovingly smeared by the second woman who then fellates, masturbates, and fucks him until he lies in utter exhaustion, an inert, motionless object.

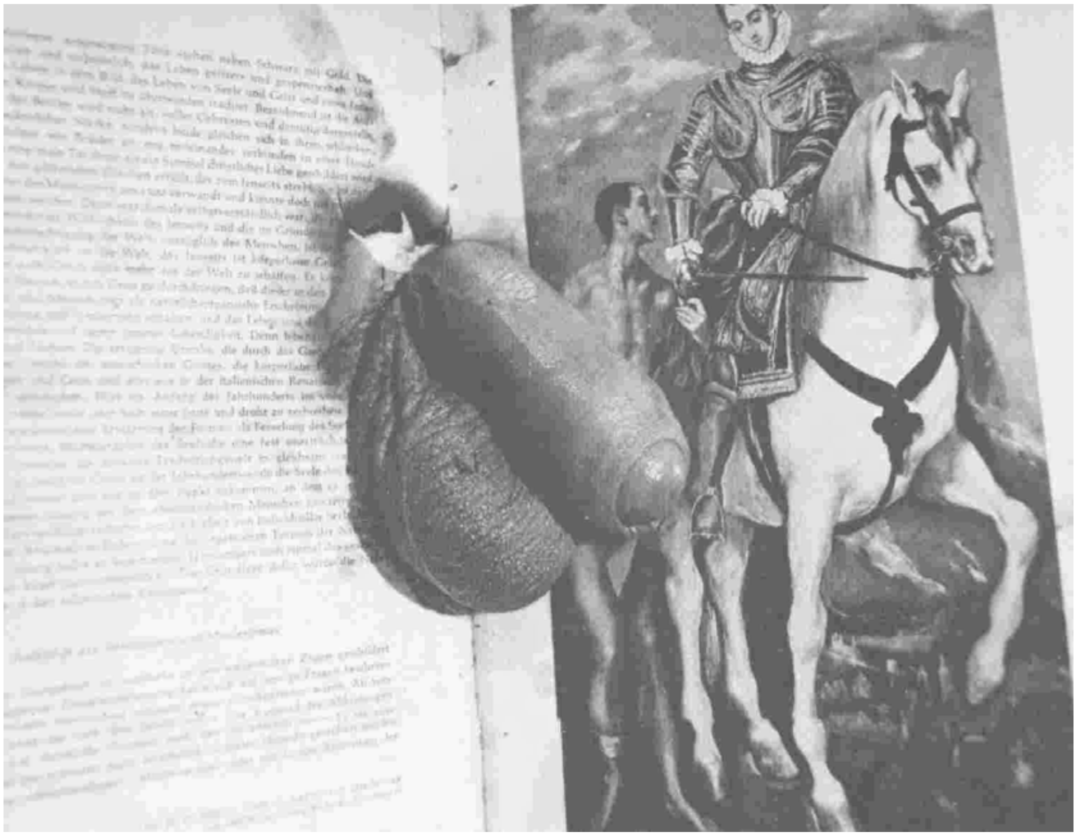
The emotions of outrage, acceptance, anger, or liberation engendered in audiencese are too profound to allow of a facile dismissal of Muehl as pathological pornographer. His images -- in their combination of explicit sexuality and violent defilement -- would appear to be even more "subversive" than those of the now almost standard hardcore pornographic films. The scatological element -- one of the secret delights of mankind -- is visually particularly disturbing, evoking both (impermissible) interest and (carefully modulated) disgust; for we do not find our own excretions disgusting and in love or sexual passion may even temporarily be capable of accepting those of the beloved. The Muehl "Materialaktionen" confront the spectator with his secret fears, aggressions, wish dreams, nightmares, and unacknowledged desires. They "stir up" residues of the concentration-camp guard, rapist, masochistic victim or brutal opressor in all of us, and reintroduce us, in painfully original fashion, to the concepts of collective guilt (or catharsis?)

My work is psychic subversion, aiming at the destruction of the pseudo-morality and ethic of state and order. I am for lewdness, for the demythologization of sexuality. I make films to provoke scandals, for audiences that are hidebound, perverted by "normalcy", mentally stagnating and conformist ... The worldwide stupefaction of the masses at the hands of artistic, religious, political swine can be stopped only by the most brutal utilization of all available weapons. Pornography is an appropriate means to cure our society from its genital panic. All kinds of revolt are welcome: only in this manner will this insane society, product of the fantasies of primeval madmen, finally collapse ... I restrict myself to flinging the food to the beasts: let them choke on it.
- Otto Muehl

SODOMA

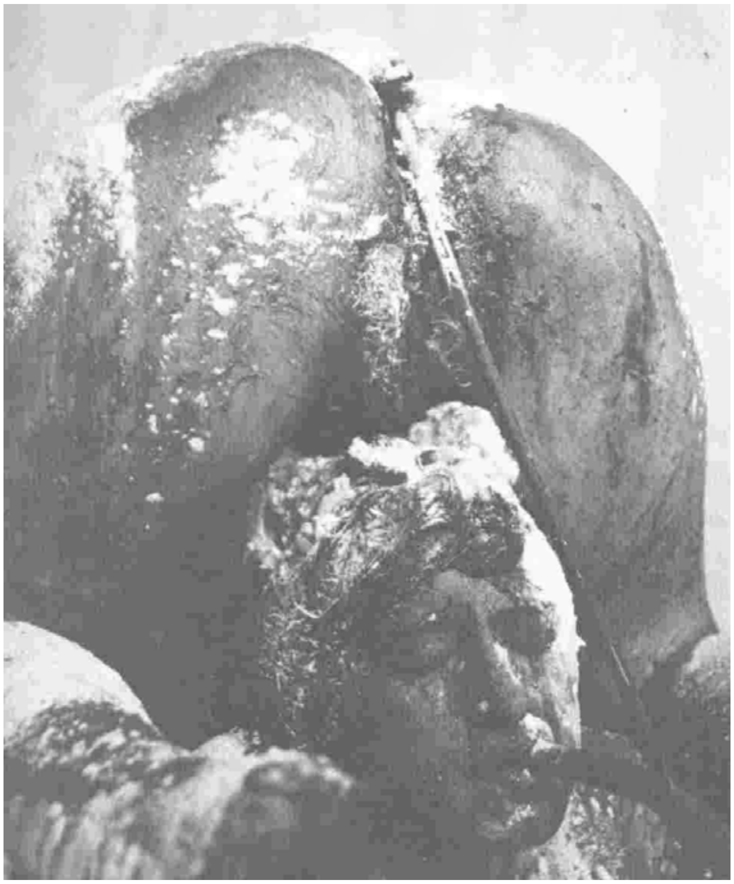
(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1970) (F)

A woman administers an enema to another in preparation for an act of coprophilia involving Otto Muehl. As in all of Muehl's "Materialaktionen", the artist participates as accomplice in the horrors and gruesome delights he portrays.



MAMA AND PAPA
(MAMA UND PAPA)
(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1963-69)

In the various films made from his scandalous live happenings, Otto Muehl emerges as one of the most subversive artists now working in the medium. The counterposing of a close-up, sharply defined penis "breaking through" the pages of an art book to attack a symbol of Western bourgeois art is comparable in its shock effect to Bunuel's eyeslitting in Un Chien Andalou. Muehl's "instructions" are specific. "Fuck an art book from behind, open it, and you'll find yourself in good company. Your cock wil be quite ready for museum display. **SC**



MAMA AND PAPA
(MAMA UND PAPA)
(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1963-69)

The sadistic manipulation of the body and its defilement by Muehl is a calculated, subversive affront to our sensibilities, aiming at consciousness-changing through methods of shock. The intent is to deromanticize and demythologize what is considered inviolable in theory yet in practice incessantly violated in warfare, political, torture, and exploitative sex. SC

MAMA AND PAPA
(MAMA UND PAPA)

(Otto Muehl, Austria, 1963-69)

For a brief moment, the action looks realistic, but then we realize that penis, fluid, and hand are artificial; significantly, this does not lessen the visual shock. Muehl's incessant attacks on our last taboos extend to the public display of bodily functions otherwise considered too private (i.e. too universal) to be viewable in good society. SC

THE SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN IS RECOGNIZABLE ABOVE ALL BY THE BEHAVIOR OF THE WOMEN THEMSELVES!
(DIE UNTERDRUCK DER FRAUEN IST VOR ALLENAM VERHALTEN DER FRAUEN SELBER ZU ERKENNEN!)

(Helmuth Costard, West Germany, 1969) (F)

One of the ideologically most aggressive filmmakers of the German avant-garde (see also his porno-political *Particularly Valuable*) has us spy on the humdrum activities of a housewife during a typical day of her life, much of it recorded in real time to reveal its boredom and stultifying idiocy. She washes dishes, talks on the telephone, masturbates in front of a mirror, cooks. With characteristic perversity, however, she is placed by a male in male dress: a brilliant and disturbing visual metaphor. Here the Warhol style of "real time" and minimal cinema is utilized for a radical political statement.

IMPUDENCE IN GRUNWALD

(Guenter Brus and Otmar Bauer, Germany, 1969)

Defecation, as a human activity, must also be demystified and made public, if the prevailing "order" (which sanctifies violence and genocide but denies the body and its functions) is to be destroyed. It is significant that Muehl's provocations (and those of artists inspired by him) occur in countries traumatized by Nazism that now find themselves impotent between two unscrupulous, violent power blocs.

VIOLATED ANGELS
(OKASARETA BYAKUI)

(Koji Wakamatsu, Japan, 1967) (F)

Reminiscent of a modern crucifixion, this is one of several young women systematically tortured and cut up amidst shrieks and moans by a young man with a gun and a razor; the ambiguity created by shadows and arrows augments the disquiet. The film ends in a blood bath of anti-feminist sadism.

This film is more symptomatic than significant. Its director claims that his twenty sado-masochist and erotic features project an anti-authoritarian message. The "angels" in this film are young nurses, methodically violated, shot, and/or cut into ribbons to the accompaniment of shrieks, moans, and croaking noises, by a young man with a gun and a razor. In a lake of blood and beautiful nude bodies, he is unable to kill the last one, curling up, fetus-like, in her lap instead. "Why did you spill so much blood?" asks the girl-mother. "To ornament you," he replies. While there is no doubt of Wakamatsu's ability as an artist, his anti-feminist sadism, unadorned by ideological context, ultimately gives his work an anti-humanist flavor.

WHY
(HVORFOR GOER DE DET?)

(Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, Denmark, 1971) (F)
The well-known sex researchers and proponents of erotic freedom present a plea for sexual tolerance in the form of a factual, non-moralistic portrayal of unorthodox sex acts. Revealing yet unsensational interviews with the protagonists are interspersed with discussions with bored, fascinated, scared or aroused Danish university students, who watch the proceedings in a sports arena transformed into a sex emporium by two exercise mattresses in its center.

The first episode involves a passionate and arousing Negro-White lesbian episode. After a great deal of athletic, obviously unstaged lovemaking on-camera, the beautiful black girl discusses the relationship in poignant detail; she regrets not having a penis, so that they could have a baby and get married ("there is no point in being married without a penis").

The second episode features simultaneous copulation by two married couples, who, in addition to their nude lovemaking before the students, are also shown in their petty-bourgeois homes. Surrounded by knick-knacks and family portraits, they discuss whether they can reach orgasm during their public performances and explain, under the circumstances somewhat incongruously, their distaste for group sex or acting in pornographic films.

The third episode involves the famous Danish girl-farmer who loves her animals. We see her lying across the back of a bull, vainly trying for arousal by masturbating him. While flies settle on her legs, of which she remains unaware, she plaintively explains that they may have to get a heifer "to get him started". But she is luckier with her pet dog who afterwards whines jealously throughout a lengthy sex act between her and her boyfriend. The most romantic sequence involves the mating of two horses ("you can't do it with a stallion, he'd split you apart", she remarks wistfully); the job done, the sudden plopping out of his organ sends waves of shocked laughter through the audience. We see her locket, with a picture of her dog; we learn the various techniques of doing it with animals; we discover in a curiously honest, simplistic interview that her mother considered sex dirty; and perhaps we do learn the tolerance the Kronhausens wish to feel.

TRASH

(Paul Morrisey, USA, 1970) (F)
A high-camp "love story" of an outrageously handsome heroin junkie and his trash-scavenging girlfriend (played by a female impersonator), this film skips from fellatio

to seduction to foot fetishism in its attacks on soap opera myths and Hollywood. A playful perversity, an acceptance of the soft underbelly of bourgeois society, a strange poignancy informs this fable of impotence, drugs, and sex. In the climactic love scene, the hero -- remaining impotent -- suggests to the lusting "girl" -- reclining on a rumpled bed among objects gathered from garbage cans -- that she use a beer bottle instead; she does, while he soli- citously inquires whether she is coming, then holds her hand and promises to do better next time. In a second scene, she accuses him, in rage, of not even letting her "suck" him off. What with an antiwar Welfare worker revealed as a malignant foot fetishist, assorted females as sexual aggressors against the forever innocent male, drug-fixes or penises casually displayed, the mounting intrusions upon the viewers' value system mark this as a truly seditious work. **SC**

TRASH
(Paul Morrisey, USA, 1970) (F)
The antidote to genteel bourgeois sexuality. The manon the floor is a heroin-addict and impotent. His dissatisfied girlfriend -- a garbage scavenger, played by a man -- uses a beer bottle instead. The composition emphasizes separation, disorder, seediness, and the film's unsentimental accepting attitude towards life. **SC**

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
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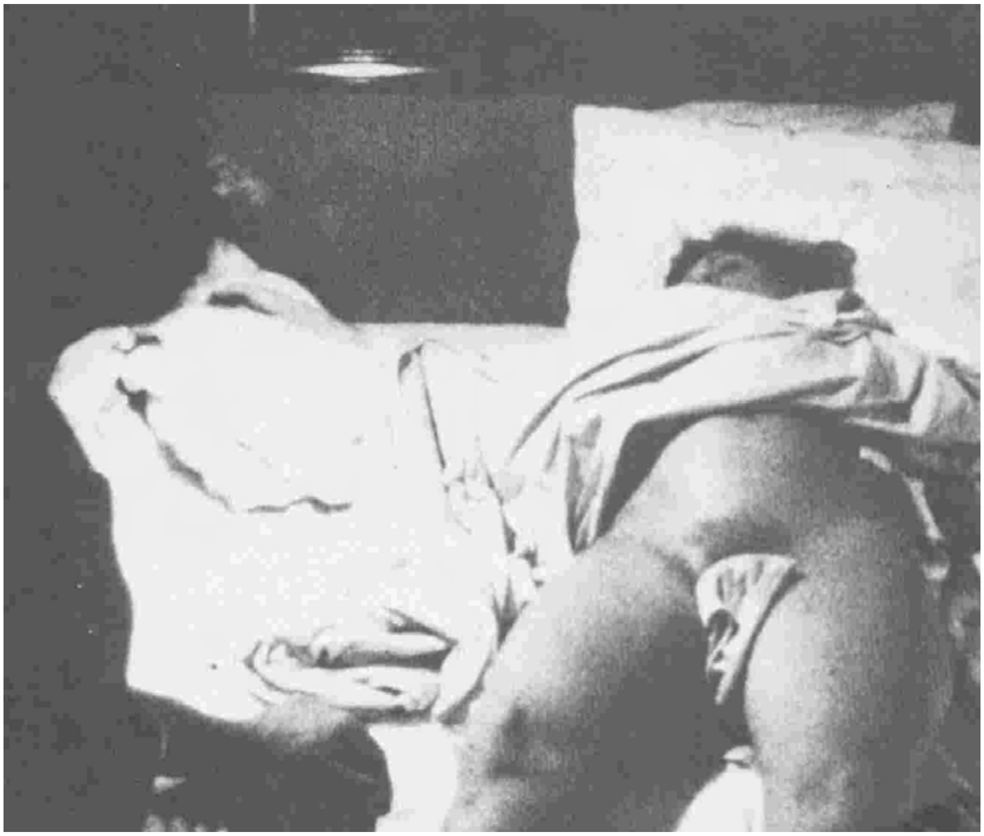


KIRSA NICHOLINA
(Gunvor Nelson, USA, 1970)
In this classic statement of counterculture sensibility, a young mother is about to give birth at home. Her body is seen at all times; we never forget that she is a women and that the new life came from sexual desire.

THE FIRST MYSTERY: BIRTH

The cinema has treated birth as a guilty secret of mankind, a mystery to be kept from the impressionable young, a clandestine medical event reserved exclusively for physicians. Had it been related to a woman's navel, instead of her primary sex organ,

the taboo would unquestionably have been weaker. For however it may be camouflaged by white sheets, birth still confronts the viewer with "the organ" and reminds him of "the act". Birth thus remainsinextricably tied to sex (and blood) taboos which have their roots in myths and religions that cannot freely accept bodies, their organs and functioning. (Significantly, it was a film from a non- theological society -- Vertov's *The Man With A Movie Camera* -- that provided an early example of documentary birth.

It is difficult to believe that until about two decades ago, films of this process were not permitted to be shown publicly. Hollywood provided euphemistic or fraudulent paraphrases of birth, occuring either offscreen (with shots of anxious relatives waiting outside) or confined to the woman's face, sometimes showing genteel and manageable discomfort; blood or screams were missing, except in the case of "loose women" who had to be made to suffer. The act itself was never seen.

The medical profession provided the second variety of birth films -- records produced for training purposes, emphasizing technique and physiology, and omitting the human dimension. A white shapeless mass, entirely swathed in sheets, filled the screen. Neither head, legs, nor body were visible, only a disembodied vaginal opening floating in space, mechanically tended, wiped, tugged at by robot-like nurses and doctors with forceps and surrealist rubber gloves. Public viewings of these films were forbidden by both censors and doctors and their circulation limited to professional audiences.

Less technical birth films began to be made in the fifties by both documentary and experimental filmmakers, providing more subjective views of the birth experience. In America, it was the film society Cinema 16 which, together with its showings of underground, scientific, erotic, and political cinema, also pioneered the first public exhibition of birth films in the early fifties, introducing both medical and underground varieties. In the sixties, American television hesitantly began to show birth as part of its educational programming, first in side-views only, later with a few head-on shots. Even today, however, both television and commercial movie theatres continue to be extremely uneasy about the topic and almost never portray it. It remained for the underground to produce the classic films on the subject, displaying a humanist attitude entirely at odds with the clinical approach.

FILMS

KIRSA NICHOLINA

(Gunvor Nelson, USA, 1970)

This is how life starts. The baby's head emerges as the father's and a friend's supporting hands assist. Until recently, this act was considered so taboo that birth films could not be shown publicly but were restricted to medical personnel.

ALL MY BABIES

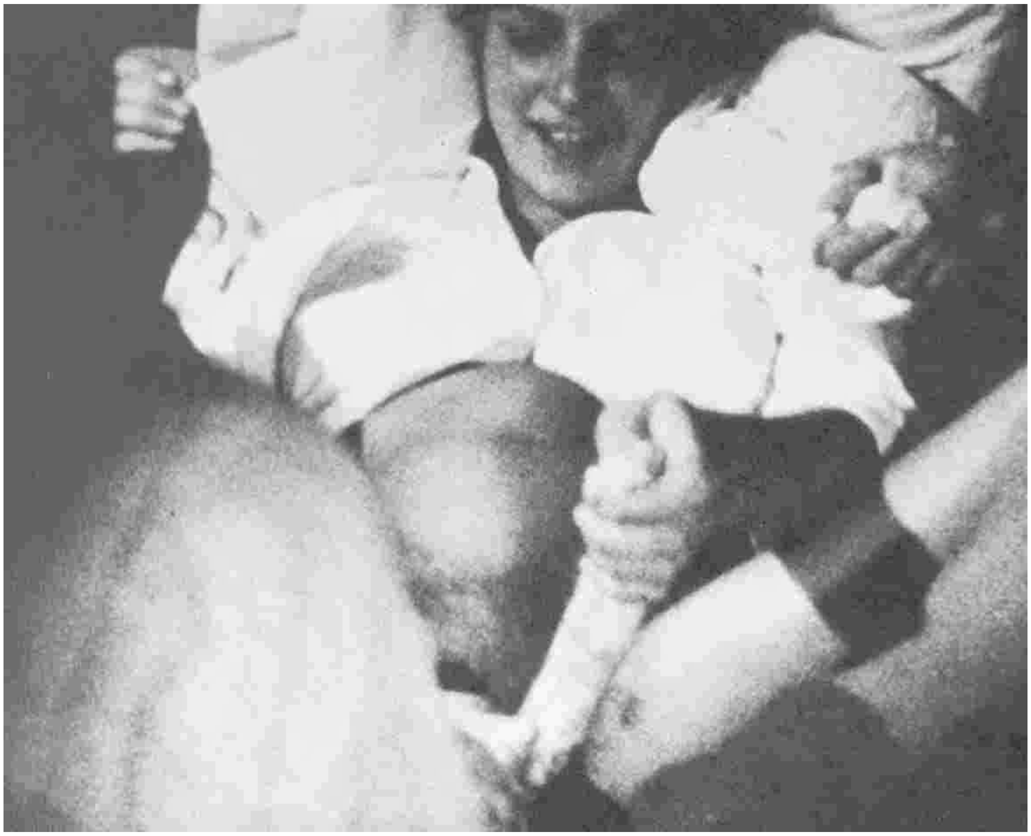
(George Stoney, USA, 1953)

One of the first and most important films to treat childbirth as a human event and to show it fully. This documentary of a compassionate Black midwife at work in the deep South remained restricted to medical personnel for many years. One cannot recall a more moving, humanist portrayal of the wonder and pain of the event.

THE BEGINNING OF LIFE (SA BORGAR LIVET)

(Lars Wallen, Sweden, 1968)

Lennart Nilsson's spectacularly beautiful and mysterious color shots of the embryo in varying stages of growth constitutes a reality-poem; silent, ethereal beings, enshrouded in mysterious, cellophane-like coverings, sleeping until the moment of birth.



KIRSA NICHOLINA

(Gunvor Nelson, USA, 1970)

This shot belies all rules (and taboos) of conventional birth. The mother takes hold of the baby's arm while it is still halfway in her body. Completely conscious, she smiles and shows her love. In a hospital, such immediate, unguarded contact is considered unhygienic. Father and friend are close-by. Birth occurs as a human experience, at home, amongst friends.

That Gunvor Nelson is one of the most gifted of the new film humanists is revealed in this deceptively simple study of a child being born to a "counterculture" couple in their home. An almost classic manifesto of the new sensibility, it constitutes a proud afficmation of man amidst technology, genocide, and ecological destruction. Birth is presented not as an antiseptic, "medical"

experience, but as the living-through of a primitive mystery, a spiritual celebration, a rite of passage. True to the new sensibility, it does not aggresively proselytize but conveys its ideology by force of example. With husband and friends quietly present, the pretty young woman, in bathrobe and red socks, is practically nude throughout; her whole body is seen at all times and, for once, the continuity between love-partner and birth-giver is maintained; she remains "erotic"; we never once forget that she is a woman and that the new life came from sexual desire.

The desperate romanticism of the new consciousness -- a defiance of dehumanization -- is manifest in the foolhardy willingness of these people to undergo the risk of a home delivery (though an apparently medically-trained person is present, and in their cool, "accepting" attitude of manking as part of nature -- the pantheism of the modern atheists. Thus she is not drugged, but fully conscious and, following the birth, experiences joy instead of exhaustion; there is so litle pain as to throw into doubt the necessity of centuries of female suffering. Instead of "specialists" coping with a "problem", we witness human beings undergoing a basic human experience within the continuity provided by conjugal home and bed.

Quiet guitar music (composed by the father) accompanies the poetic, tactile images, unobtrusively recorded by the detached camera; no avant-garde pyrotechnics interfere with the intentional simplicity of the statement. As the baby, still half in the mother's body, begins to emerge, the mother smilingly takes its hand in her own and holds it. This tender gesture would not be possibly in a hospital delivery because of drugs and antiseptic precautions. Perhaps, indeed, life should be lived as an open-ended adventure and "security" cast to the winds if we want to become human.

KIRSA NICHOLINA

(Gunvor Nelson, USA, 1970)

An appropriately more somber long-shot rounds out the fullness of the experience. The mother, with great love, also feels the weight of the moment. The father watches, without interfering. But the focus of the composition is on the mother's pubic area, re-establishing not only her (erotic) femininity but also the presence of blood and excretions carelessly covering the sheet. A family has just been born and this is a serious moment.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF A CAT

(Alexander Hammid, USA, 1946)

This sensitive, poetic documentary by a distinguished film director -- humorous and tender in turn -- explores love, birth, and growth in a cat family, offering inevitable analogies with humans. Banned in 1948 by the New York State censors as "indecent" because of its moving birth sequences, it is also the perfect sex education film for children (as was also true of George Hoellering's classic Hortobagy, with its unique sequence of the birth of a foal. Visual storyline and lack of human intrusion capture beauty, dignity, and simplicity in a surprising perspective.

WINDOW WATER BABY MOVING

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1959)

A leading American avant-gardist, using his mobile camera as an extension of body and mind, records the birth at home of his first child. Deeply felt, entirely poetic, the film explores the event as an experience; the camera soars and moves with the emotion of the event, capturing its shocking physicality and primitive wonder.

KIRSA NICHOLINA

(Gunvor Nelson, USA, 1970)

It is over. A friend who has been present throughout extends the feeling of togetherness by tender physical contact. There is no awkwardness in their interaction, despite the mother's careless nudity, nor is anyone concerned with the camera. This is a far cry from bourgeois post-natal hospital visits with flowers, from which, in addition, the baby (quarantined elsewhere) is absent. The father plays a song he composed on the soundtrack and a human (rather than a medical) experience comes to an end.

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

PIGPEN aka PIGSTY
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, France/Italy, 1969) (F)
The contemplation of death. In one episode of Pasolini's most personal and most controversial film, Clementi plays a savage during the Middle Ages, reduced to cannibalism by hunger in some deserted, possibly war-torn landscape. Caught, he is tied to a stake and eaten in turn by scavenging animals. SC

THE ULTIMATE SECRET: DEATH

Although in a fit of metaphysical paradox contemporary science acknowledges the boundary between life and non-life to be fluid, the periodic transformation of matter from one state into another continues to evoke all the superstitious alarms and taboos of pre-

history. For primitive man believed death to be neither normal nor inevitable, but rather caused by the breaking of a taboo, sorcery, or the revenge of the dead; and since it was a source of pollution, the dying, the dead, and those who handled them had therefore to be isolated. Clothing, houses, and household objects were to be destroyed and, according to Fraser, even burial grounds were taboo.

While it is clear that these prohibitions and fears remain in varying degrees part of our subconscious, we tend to overlook their origin in superstition. The corpse is still considered contagious to such an extent that not merely its actual presence, but even its fictional portrayal sets off profound anxiety; for it disrupts the pattern of normal life, subverting the illusion of eternity and order on which our existence is built, and all the reassurances of power, wealth, and ideology with which we attempt to hold nothingness at bay.

That the commercial cinema either avoids death or romanticizes it is therefore not surprising. The insufferable sentimentality and the manageable, antiseptic way in which people die in commercial films (*Love Story* for example) once again reveals this kind of cinema to be an important purveyor of Establishment values. For the smooth functioning of technological society requires the excommunication of all disruptive elements (criminals, madmen, corpses) in the quickest, most secretive manner possible.

What is more significant, however, is that the documentary filmmakers -- those intrepid realists, having roamed the globe twice over for material -- carefully neglect this area. Although they have already documented large areas of human activity and visited all the forbidden places with their lightweight cameras and portable sound, their curiosity, with hardly an exception, has stopped short of death, funeral parlors, morgues, or morticians with their ointments, tools, and injections. That this entire area -- more universal by far than others covered *ad nauseum* -- simply does not exist in contemporary cinema, reveals taboo in its purest form.

This is why there are so few film records of individuals dying of natural causes; it is rather war deaths or executions that have been caught on film. Even these are rarely shown except on ceremonial occasions at which an audience gathers in guilt, remorse, or solemn, ineffectual vows never to forget.

The cinematic image -- the meticulous reproduction of whatever is before the camera -- has a way of looking "real" even if fictional; how much more powerful its impact is when portraying a true event. It is our unconscious perception of the gap between actuality and invention that gives the accidentally filmed knife murder of the black spectator in the Rolling Stones film *Gimme Shelter* such tremendous power. For when we witness unstaged, real death in the cinema, we

are frightened, caught in the sweet and deadly trap of the voyeur; mixed feelings of attraction and repulsion take hold of us as we anxiously watch the actual end of another being and search his face for hints of the mystery or proper rules of conduct.

The Nazis, pursuing their dreams of super-human perfection, banished death from their films altogether, hiding concentration camp corpses, war casualties, and civilian victims even better than the Americans were to hide their victims in Vietnam. Film footage of the latter exists in profusion, but dead soldiers or civilians are seldom seen on American television. Even more significantly, America prohibited the showing of US government film records of what happened to the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; such is the power and fear of death even over its perpetrators.

The reaction to the use of these bombs again makes it clear that our technology far outstrips our capacity for outrage or empathy. We are capable of feeling one death or even several (and of making these stand symbolically for more); but once confronted with casualty figures of war and other of man's "civilizing" missions, we "tune out". This indifference to large numbers (one million Vietnamese ... six million Jews ... ten million Pakistanis) becomes more pronounced when the corpses belong to "underdeveloped" races. We react more strongly to white students killed at Kent State than to black students killed at some (which?) Southern college; to twelve clearly identified Israelis killed in Munich rather than to fifty unknown Arabs killed in retaliation; and since in any case we have "difficulty" distinguishing one Asiatic from another, we can bear the deaths in Hiroshima or Vietnam with greater equanimity.

This same poverty-stricken imagination -- so convenient in times of stress -- compels us to sympathize far more with those about to die than those already dead; it is apparently too difficult for the living to identify with a corpse. Our sensitivity and sophistication prompts to erect elaborate mechanisms for censoring pictorial representation of acts that we commit instead of concentrating our efforts on their elimination; it is never the image that goes too far but always reality.

The calculated omission of death has not been lost on the subversives of cinema. They have begun to invade this last stronghold of primitive taboo, dragging from their graves the victims of warfare, torture, state persuasion, new weaponry, and extermination camps in order to compel us either to look at these horrors or to eradicate them. And in beginning to record and comment on "normal" death as well, these same subversives attempt to project a more humanist acceptance of its mystery by subsuming it into the mystery of life. Said Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his *The First Circle*:

> **There is no immortality and therefore death is not an evil; it simply does not concern us; while we exist, there is no**

death, and when death comes, we are gone.

The concentration camp universe, 30 years later, has variously become a cliche of mass culture (referred to by that most offensive of alienating terms, "the holocaust"), been elevated to a profound moral problem, or pushed into the subconscious as an unbelievable episode, however true, of no relevance to our times.

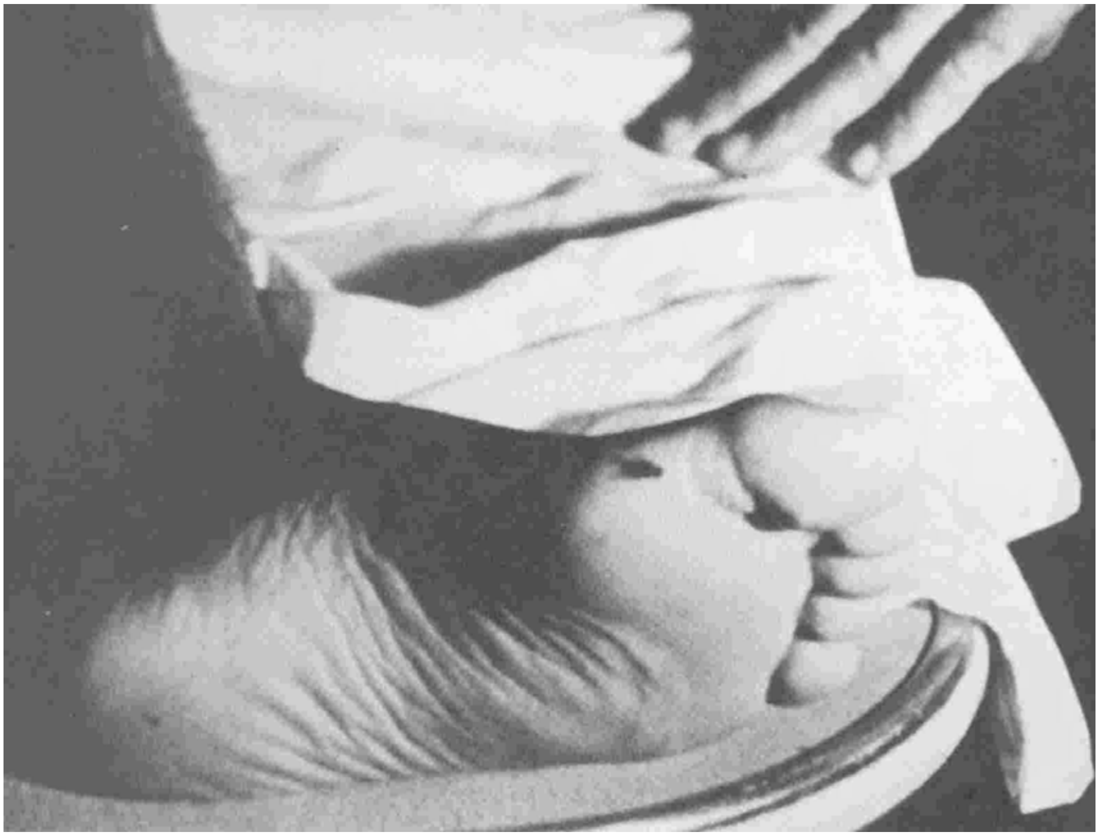
While the Nazis were in power, the very topic of the camps was taboo, although hinted at in intentionally vague internal propaganda. No film records made by enemies of the regime within the camps survive, nore were any documentaries made by the Nazis for public consumption (except for the two films described in the chapter on concentration camps); but there exists in the archives horrifying footage shot by guards or officials.

Since the fall of the regime, a band of stubborn film subversives in several countries have, from time to time, attempted to recall the horror (Resnais called his concentration camp film "an essay in human forgetfulness") and to re-establish a link between our "rational" world and this by now mythological event. They have done this by dispassionate documentation of actual evidence, artistic transmutation of the material, or by the recreation of an "atmosphere".

The subversion of the concentration camp lies in its absolute denial of bourgeois normalcy, its ultimate abolition of rationalism. In the enormity of this one event, many have found the death of God, the end of history, the destruction of the myth of man.

Thirty years later, one's only quarrel with the philosophers is that they turned to hopelessness too soon; for since then, we have for the first time witnessed the utilization of atomic weapons against humanity and the destruction of entire countries, both in the name of peace.

FILMS



THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1972)

A mysterious hand, a white cloth, and a table edge, a fly walks calmly on the sole of a foot, undisturbed. A powerful visual metaphor from the first film to deal with morgue and autopsy, recorded in poetic documentary style by a noted avant-gardist. Here life and death are inextricable as medical personnel and corpses mingle in close contact. SC

Inevitably, it is an avant-garde filmmaker who confronts us for the first time with morgue and autopsy room. This is an appalling, haunting work of great purity and truth. It dispassionately records whatever transpires in front of the lens; bodies sliced length-wise, organs removed, skulls and scalp cut open with electric tools, blood drawn; a fly that walks on the sole of a foot, undisturbed. There are timeless images: the hands, closed forever upon themselves, the dead eyes, the deft and simple opening of a body's surface, the empty abdominal cage (a hole at the bottom leading to the outside), suddenly poignant clothes (the unexpectedly final attire of murder or accident victims), a penis (at last at peace) attached to an open, gaping body. Life and death are inextricable here, as doctors and orderlies (never clearly seen) mingle with and manipulate the inert flesh, dead and live hands often touching its strong close-ups. After every act of carnage, the merciful white sheet descends on the remains, a symbolic gesture reinforced in series of quick, haunting fades. Then the camera follows (in tracking shots and rapid cuts) a surrealist procession of dimly-lit heaps -- at times still red with blood -- on stretchers and under shrouds, receding into

the distance along bleak corridors under greenish lights.

A great desire "to see clearly" informs the work -- the film's title derives from the Greek meaning of the term "autopsy" -- a refusal to sentimentalize or to avert one's glance; yet the "objective" film-maker continuously breaks through to compassion and horrified wonder in his selection of shots, angles, and filmic continuity.

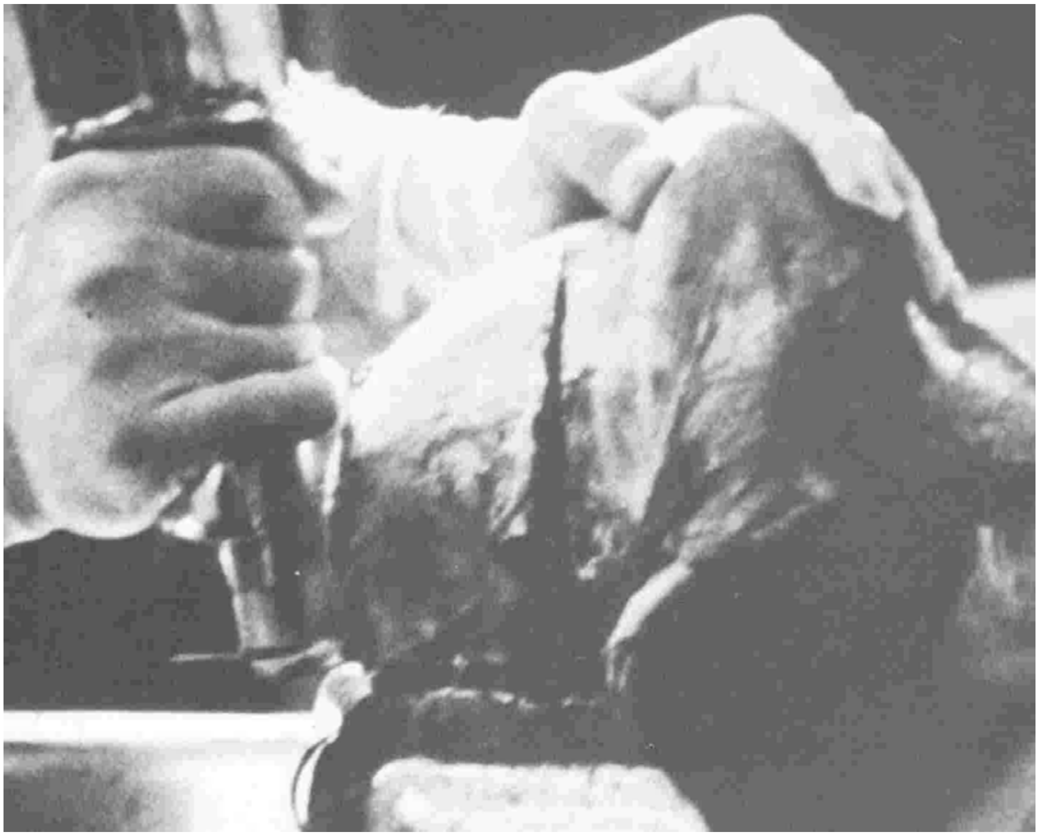
With almost the entire film photographed in close-up or medium shot and utter silence, form and content are for once perfectly blended to create a subversive work that changes our consciousness.

This final demystification of man -- an unforgettable reminder of our physicality, fragility, mortality -- robs us of metaphysics only to reintroduce it on another level; for the more physical we are seen to be, the more marvelous becomes the mystery.

THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1972)

The doctor's hand nonchalantly digs into a chest cavity to look for a bullet, as his arm rests on the body's exposed organs. The texture and thickness of skin and fat reveals just how far away we are from our insides. To accept this taboo shot means to accept one's physicality and to reject any metaphysical concept of the human body. SC



THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1972)

Two impersonal, professional hands coolly at work on a mysterious object; a man's exposed skull, about to be removed, while his scalp has been pushed forward to cover all of his face except his chin. Particularly upsetting are the surgical drill and the up-turned scalp; direct attacks on the viewer. SC

THE ACT OF SEEING WITH ONE'S OWN EYES

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1972)

The eye of death. The open eye of a corpse, caught and framed in a breathtaking, lingering shot by a master filmmaker. It looks upwards, unblinkingly, and inexplicable gradations of light and shadow. This is the end. SC

THE ATOM STRIKES

(Army Pictorial Service, US Signal Corps for War Department, USA, 1950)

The explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and their aftereffects are among the most widely photographed and most thoroughly suppressed events in history. While hundreds of thousands of feet were shot by scientific, military, and medical personnel, most of this material remains secreted in official archives. Significantly, this first official record (released only on a restricted basis) is confined to structural damage, and completely omits visual evidence of human casualties. The initially routine interview with a survivor (a Jesuit priest, also described in John Hersey's book) becomes a horrifying reliving of the event when he recounts the actual bombing.

BIRTH AND DEATH

(Arthur and Evelyn Barron, USA, 1968) (F)

This cinema-verite-style documentary interweaves the pregnancy and childbirth of a young woman with the lingering death of a cancer patient to comment on the celebration and tragedy of existence. The tenderness and intimacy of the young couple, and the mystery of birth are contrasted with the dignity of a man who faces his death without deception.

THE BLOOD OF THE BEASTS
(LE SANG DES BETES)

(Georges Franju, France, 1949)

When the butcher raises his axe-like tool to stun the animal, the camera stays with him until the bitter end; there is no attempt either to protect or cheat the spectator; we must come to terms with daily slaughter, committed (not only in slaughterhouses) in our name.

This documentary on the slaughterhouses of Paris is one of the great masterpieces of subversive cinema; here, for once, we are face to face with death, and are neither protected nor cheated. Unlike Hollywood films, when the butcher raises the hammer to stun the horse there is no "cutting away"; the camera, objectively and cruelly, stays with the event, making us its shocked accomplices. As these "killers without hate", knee-deep in blood and surrounded by steaming excrema and vomit, murder animals in cold indifference before the camera -- the number of animals dying but a fraction of a day's output of slaughterhouses everywhere -- we learn to see, and then perhaps to feel what we have not felt before. Violence here is neither fictional nor titillating; it is massive and real.

A dream-like quality permeates the intense realism of the images; a surrealist intent -- akin to Bunuel's slitting of the eye-ball in *Un Chien Andalou* -- is discernable in this anti-bourgeois film. But the eyeball, however shocking, was fictional; *The Blood*

of the Beasts is real. Forcing us to view another being's painful and sordid death in all its detailed enormity, it subverts our natural state of consciousness and opens us to greater insight. Franju, committed artist, resistance fighter, moralist, wants us to consider all slaughter anywhere committed on our behalf by those we hire to do our dirty work, so that we can sit down at clean tablecloths and deny complicity.

THE BLOOD OF THE BEASTS
(LE SANG DES BETES)

(Georges Franju, France, 1949)

Amidst steaming blood and men wading in excrement, even Vietnam and the concentration camps are not too far away. The killing of animals in Paris slaughterhouses becomes, in this masterpiece, a poetic metaphor of the human condition. Its unflinching realism and ice-cold brutality --depicting what "killers without hate" (Baudelaire) do to animals daily at our behest -- carries its own surreal impact, which compels those willing to watch to enter into new awareness.

DEATH DAY

(Visuals: Sergei Eisenstein, Mexico, 1934)

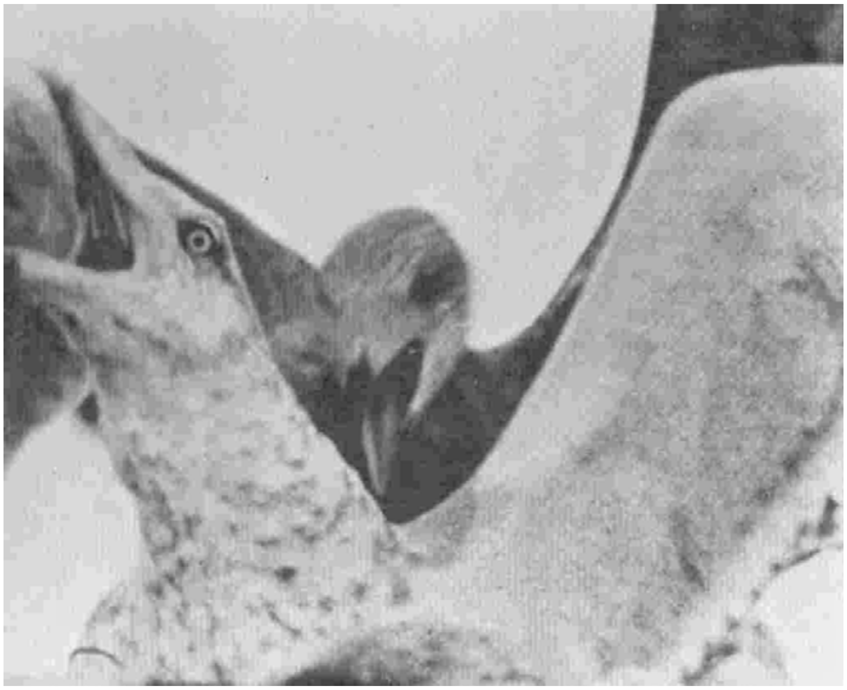
The enormous amont of film shot by Eisenstein in Mexico for

his ill-fated *Que Viva Mexico* was never edited or completed. However it provided footage for works edited by others, of which this is one. *Death Day* is a record of a curious Mexican holiday, a cross between Memorial Day and Halloween, taken from the Aztec feast for the dead. For one day, death rules supreme in the form of candy skulls, death toys, processions of skeletons, and funereal masks; yet it also seems strangely, almost benevolently, integrated into life, the fear of it weakened by mockery and familiarity.

DIABOLIQUE (LES DIABOLIQUES)

(Henri-Georges Clouziot, France, 1955) (F)

One of the most frightening and shocking films ever made, *Diabolique* is notable for its particularly effective exploitation of our fear of the dead and their return. For its diabolic timing, sadistic heightening of tension, and meticulous shock-montage are merely stations on the way to the ultimate horror: the return to life, before the breaking eyes of the murderess, of the "drowned" victim of her deed, gruesomely emerging from a filled bathtub, and in a further turn of the screw, his apparent removal of his own "eyes". Since only a small portion of the film's length consists of frightening images, it is clear that Clouziot succeeds in evoking the "nameless dread" of our atavistic past.



THE END OF ONE

(Paul Kocela, USA, 1971)

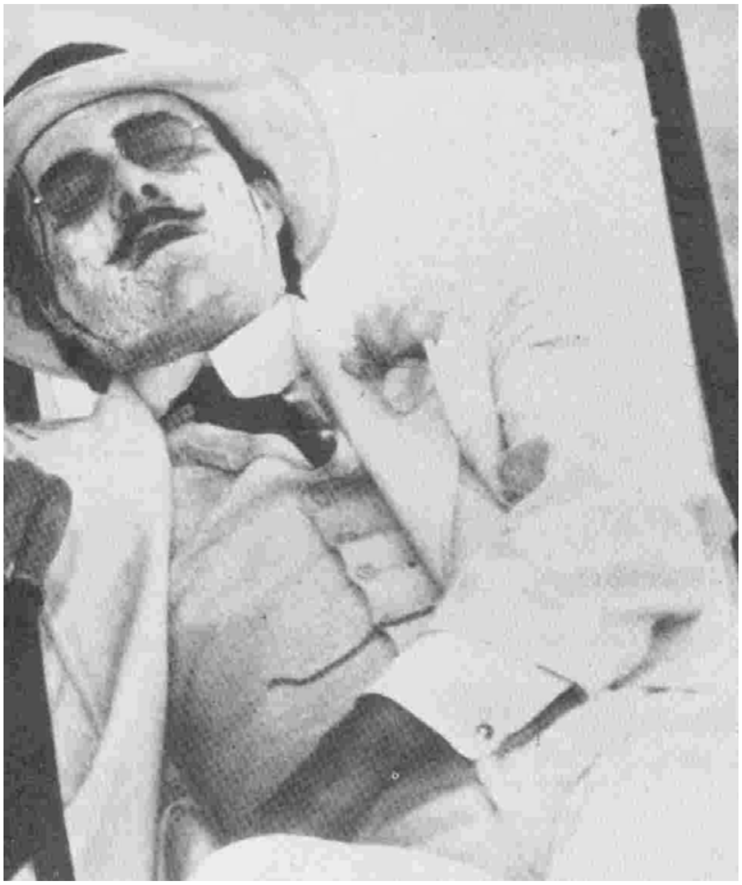
These alien, prehistoric monster birds -- caught in a powerful, dynamic composition of blacks and whites -- are merely close-ups of seagulls, but photographed from their viewpoint. One dies a slow, lonely death on a beach, recorded by the filmmaker with utmost gravity.

A documentary of a dying seagull, alone on a beach. She falls for the last time, turns her head sideways and we see her eyes. There is no sound except nature. Time passes. Her eyes glaze over as we watch them. A being has died; a filmmaker has made us care.

FORBIDDEN BULLFIGHT (CORRIDA INTERDITE)

(Denyus Columb de Daunant)

This lyrical, dreamlike masterpiece of the visual cinema -- entirely based on documentary footage -- creates its hallucinatory effects through that simple and perhaps most effective of all filmic devices; slow motion. One of the few films to convey the mystique of the *corrida* in emotional rather than intellectual terms, it proceeds entirely in choreographed, majestic images, and never fails to remind us of impending death; when it comes, the driving home of the sword is repeated in twelve langorous dissolves in a beautiful, ominous cascade of images.



DEATH IN VENICE

(Luschino Visconti, Italy, 1971)

The chalk-white face, in ironic contrast with newly-dyed moustache and hair (for youthful looks), denotes the death of the famous writer on the Lido, his unrequited homosexual passion for a young boy now forever unfulfillable. Sun and sweat make the hair dye run down his face in tragic rivulets. SC

FORBIDDEN GAMES (JEUX INDERDITS)

(Rene Clement, France, 1952) (F)

Very few films are capable of portraying the secret worlds of children; this is achieved here in the context of a story of war and death. Set in France during the Second World War, it deals with a five-year-old girl orphan and an older boy who, ironically, can retain normalcy only by recreating images and episodes of a death so familiar as to be integrated into their universe. Building secret burial grounds for animals, they engage in rites and fashion a macabre alternate reality open only to them. The psychological penetration of the mind of the child is consummate; and death, in its many guises, never absent.

GERM AND CHEMICAL WARFARE

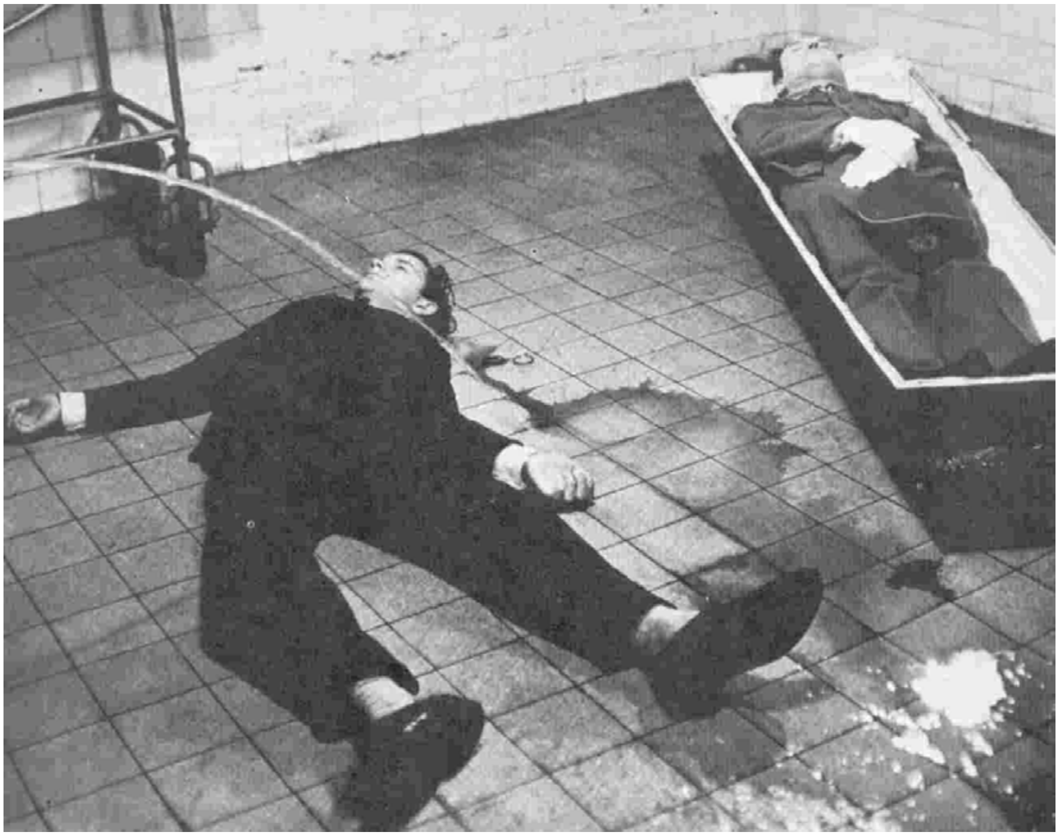
(CBS News, USA, 1968)

A documentary look at the chemical and biological weapons developed and stored by the US, including nerve gases, chemical disorienting and disabling agents, defoliants, crop-killers, plague, anthrax, and botulism carriers. The film asks why the US remains the only major power which has not ratified the 1925 Geneva Treaty against chemical and bacteriological warfare. There is an odor of massive death.

INTERVIEWS WITH MY LAI VETERANS

(Joseph Strick, USA, 1971)

This deeply disturbing cinema-verite study consists of uncensored interviews with American veterans of the My Lai massacres. It is a film about death -- and how somebody's death can be caused, faced and then talked about by the assassin. Clean-cut young Americans, now back in civilian life, recount with defensive smiles, false indifference, and concealed remorse, how and why they murdered. Disassociated from their acts, destroyed by war, dead in life, alien to guilt, they emerge as victims as well as executioners. Their artless straightforwardness convinces us immediately of the veracity of their horrifying self-indictment. The fact that their statements are accepted as truth is what creates the shattering, seditious effect of this film and separates it from the propaganda.



THE CREMATOR

(Juraj Herz, Czechoslovakia, 1968)

A mystifying, therefore arresting image. An open coffin, with an undoubted corpse; a young man, as if dead, next to it; and, most disturbing of all, a stream of water -- the only action, hence, focal point of the still; only later do we notice the hand holding the nozzle, a terrifying sight, since its invisible (and implicated) owner offers no help but merely rinses what we now realize to be blood from the young man's body.

IT IS GOOD TO LIVE

(Fumio Kamei, Japan, 1958)

This is one of the first documentary films about the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It coldly records the lingering effects of the bomb on the victims decades later. In a succession of realistic, shocking sequences, their lives, difficulties, and cameraderie are examined. The very objective of incidents, scenes, and faces makes the film the more terrifying.

MEDITATION ON THE END OF HUMAN LIFE (POSLEDNI VECI CLOVEKA)

(Jovan Kubicek, Czechoslavakia, 1967)

A very original student film from Prague's famed film

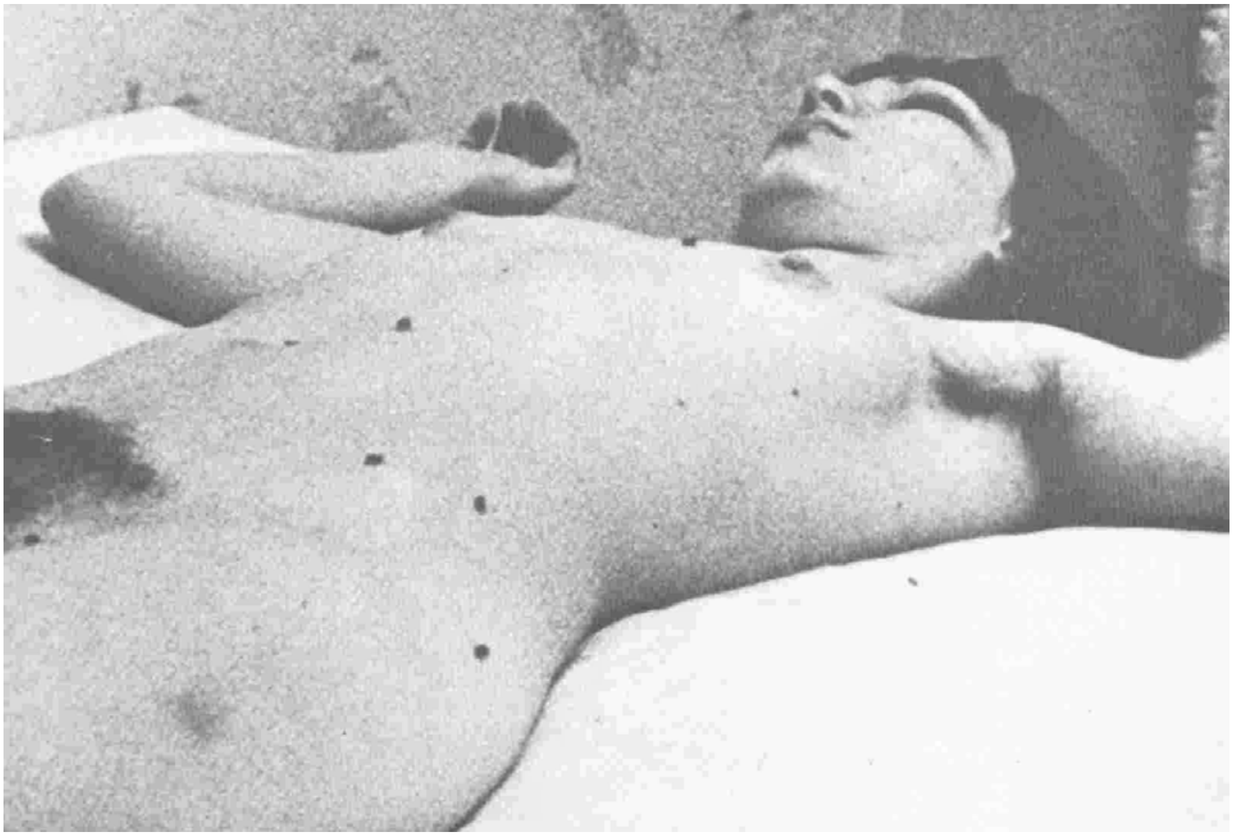
school, made during the period of liberalization. This clear-eyed study of funeral services and crematoria reflects on how mass production methods and the impersonality of technological society have invaded even this last ritual. An accelerated sequence condenses the endless repititions of identical funeral services, the arrivals and departures of mourners, into a few moments of sad comment. Though crematoria in the East are fast, popular, and clean, the director points to the even more efficient ones of Terecin and Hiroshima.

A MOVIE

(Bruce Conner, USA, 1958)

One of the most original works of the international film avant-garde, this is a pessimistic comedy of the human condition, consisting of executions, catastophes, mishaps, accidents, and stubborn feats of ridiculous daring, magically compiled from jungle movies, calendar art, Academy leaders, cowboy films, cartoons, documentaries, and newsreels. None of the visual material is original; and none is used for its original purpose. Amidst initial amusement and seeming confusion, an increasingly dark social statement emerges which profoundly disturbs us on a subconscious level.

Particularly important are the documentary images of death; the battered bodies of Mussolini and his mistress, suspended upside down; the crash of a waterplane, with the pilot hitting against the fuselage in a brief, terrifying moment; a one-second documentary shot of an execution, "revealed" as if it was a dirty secret, and just as quickly withdrawn; the death of a bridge (wildly swaying, then collapsing), immediately following an optimistic speech by Teddy Roosevelt. The entire film is a hymn to creative montage.



FLY

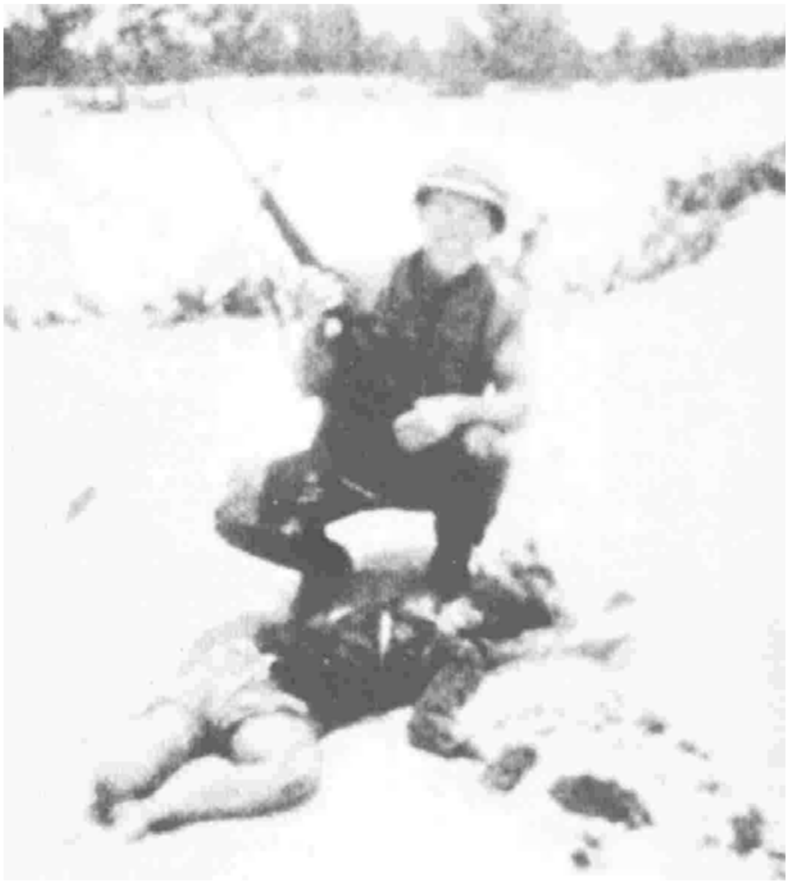
(Yoko Ono, Great Britain, 1970)

An ominous and deceptive shot; the girl is heavily drugged, not dead, but the presence of flies busily infesting all parts of her body sets off an inevitable chain of morbid associations. The graniness of the image further contributes to this impression; it is as if the body was already decomposing. SC

NECROLOGY

(Standish Lawder, USA, 1969)

Minimal cinema in the service of a non-verbal, apocalyptic statement: a stationary camera trained on an escalator crowded with blank, motionless, introverted people -- endless victims -- ascending (backwards!) in unbroken, heart-rending succession, to heaven, hell, or oblivion. Original and disturbing.



WINTERSOLDIER

(Winterfilm Collective, USA, 1972)

"It was like a hunting trip". A further example of America's civilizing role in Vietnam, showing the hunter and his trophy. The smile, the stance, the contemptuous posing of executioner astride the victim he has "bagged", are still visible in this indistinct photograph which thereby already symbolizes (for those with short memories) the slow receding of the crime into history. But the task of the subversives is to tear open old wounds.

This feature-length documentary of the historic, terrifying testimony given by more than 200 ex-GIs at the 1971 Detroit Winter Soldier Investigation concerning American atrocities in Vietnam renders academic any disputes as to the relative effectiveness of word as against image. There is simply no substitute for seeing the faces of the men as they testify: their strain, tears, and hesitations, all inexorable guarantors of veracity, none available from a reading of the testimony.

One after another, these veterans of crime recount their experiences in acts of accusation and expiation; the testimony of these long-haired, intense young men implicates them as well; and judicious intercutting of old photographs showing them in crewcut and uniform further solidifies this theme and broadens it to one potentially encompassing all of us, given only our presence at the right time and place.

Authenticity and horror are built with small, precise details. An American officer advises his men not to count prisoners at the beginning of their removal in American planes, only upon arrival. A woman is split open from vagina to neck. A small child is stoned to death for taunting the Americans.

The effect of the testimonials is enhanced by intercutting of color slides and live footage of tortures, killings, burnings, bombings -- images otherwise hidden away by the hundreds and thousands of feet in film libraries of television networks and never seen. They show pitiful, enormously frightened, totally disoriented human beings, delicate and small in build, violated and murdered by massive, huge Westerners who seem to look like men from outer space, dropped by evil machines to rain destruction on their ancestral lands. All the "cliches" are there -- the crying mother displaying a maimed child, the aged grandparents herded off, the civilians crouching in unbelievable fear in bulrushes, ineffectively hiding from helicopters in which one of the monsters actually films their plight. One feels frightened at the thought of untold thousands of others patiently waiting in television vaults to be stirred into pitiful life by future researchers, an accusing army of corpses that we will never surmount.

Far from being a horror show or propagandistic exercise, however, the film, by the very enormity of what it portrays, becomes a philosophical set-piece, raising all the basic moral issues; the mechanisms by which "ordinary" people become torturers and killers, the inability to feel the suffering of others, the possible inevitability of violence and murder in human affairs, the capability of all-encompassing evil on the part of everybody. It postulates self-protection, the need to maintain personal sanity, the urge for revenge, as premises for total indifference toward the "enemy", and asks unvoiced, insistent questions as to the irreversible damage this war has already done to American civilization.

The great and ultimate stars of the film are the tears shed by men who have learned that to destroy the false machismo instilled by school, state, and army, it is necessary to learn how to cry. Through the depth of their tearful misery, openly expressed, they reveal the true essence of a masculinity which, for the first time, is human.

THE RACE

(William Copland, Australia, 1970)

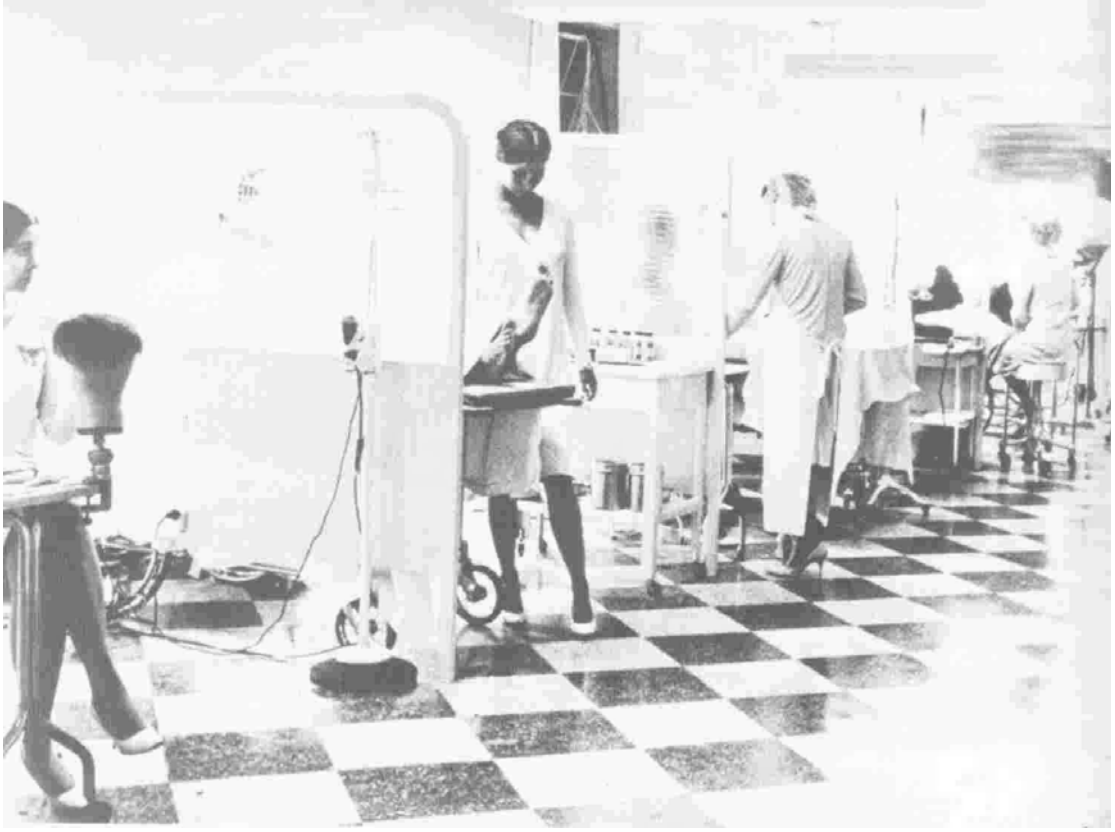
In this angry newsreel compilation of injustice against the oppressed there occurs, without any particular preparation, a most shocking documentary sequence: the meticulously detailed, on-camera killing of a captured prisoner -- possibly in the course of the

Congo "action" -- who, cringing on the ground, has just been promised life. Since the "outcome" is unknown to either him or us, we "share" -- in the comfort of a movie theatre -- his unbearable dread, and attempt to believe, as does he, the promises and taunts of his captors. A tiny part of our humanity, perhaps, dies with this unknown man -- one nameless victim out of thousands dying somewhere at any given moment.

REFLECTION
(ZRCADLENI)

(Evald Schorm, Czechoslavakia, 1965)

A leading director of the Czech film renaissance provides a philosophical meditation on life and death, set amidst complex hospital apparatus and the sadness, hope, or resignation of the patients. Existentialist rather than optimist, the approach is one of humanistic atheism, accepting death as part of life. Interviews with doctors and nurses explore their outlook; all speak of death as a fact, without either sentimentality or religiosity. The studied objectivity of the film only imperfectly hides an intense emotionalism.



THE LOVED ONE

(Tony Richardson, Great Britain, 1965)

Perhaps only a "foreigner" could so elegantly have

exposed and debunked America's high-camp burial establishments, their financial greed, hypocrisy and fake religiosity. In a very American attempt at banishing death, the mortuary literally assumes the trappings of a beauty salon, an ominous union of Eros and Thanatos. SC

RITE OF LOVE AND DEATH

(Yukio Mishima, Japan, 1965)

The distinguished Japanese novelist who committed hara-kiri in 1970 as a protest against the corruption of national ideals uncannily anticipated this in a film he wrote, directed, and starred in five years earlier, in which he enacts the same traditional samurai suicide by which he later took his life. Based on his short story, "Patriotism", it deals with a historical incident of the 1930s, in which an officer in the elite guard is asked by the Emperor to execute a number of his peers after an attempted *coup d'etat*. Faced with the traditional samurai conflict of divided loyalties -- to Emperor and to fellows-in-arms -- the officer maintains his honor in the only way possible for him: hara-kiri. His detailed, bloody suicide is one of the most gruesome and convincing examples of fictional death in cinema. Acted by Mishima himself, its ferocity is the more frightening in view of what actually transpired later.

SIRIUS REMEMBERED

(Stan Brakhage, USA, 1959)

The face of death; a daring, silent poem on a dead and gradually decaying dog, compusively recalled in interrelated, dream-like episodes, from many angles and in many seasons. The handheld camera, in its distraught movements, reflects the filmmaker's anguish. A homage.

TO LIVE
(VIVRE)

(Carlos Vilardebo, France, 1960?)

The eternal victims. This compassionate compilation of authentic documentary materials of the last 20 years -- without a single staged scene -- shows the endless suffering, torture, and death of civilians, war victims, natives, peasants, people all over the world, in images of unforgettable power and directness. Just think -- admonishes an introductory title -- scenes such as these are probably taking place once again somewhere at this very moment.

THE TWILIGHT OF THE DAMNED
(L'AUBE DES DAMNES)

(Ahmed Rachedi, Algeria, 1970) (F)

This excellent feature-length documentary -- the story of the imperialists colonization of Africa -- is a film about death. Its most shocking sequences derive from the captured French film archives in Algeria containing -- unbelievably -- masses of French-shot documentary footage of their tortures, massacres and executions of Algerians. The real death of children, passers-by, resistance fighters, one after the other, becomes unbearable. Rather than by blatant propaganda, the film convinces entirely by its visual evidence, constituting an object lesson for revolutionary cinema.

VIETNAM, LAND OF FIRE

(No credits available, France, 1966)

The ferocious reality of the suffering, torture, and death imposed on the civilian population of Vietnam by America, as seen in newsreel and documentary materials; children with terrible wounds, bodies being cut open (on camera); the effects of napalm and poisonous chemicals, corpses burnt to a crisp, victims without limbs, villages set on fire -- and Vietnamese resistance.

WHEN LOVE FALLS
episode in LOVE AND THE CITY

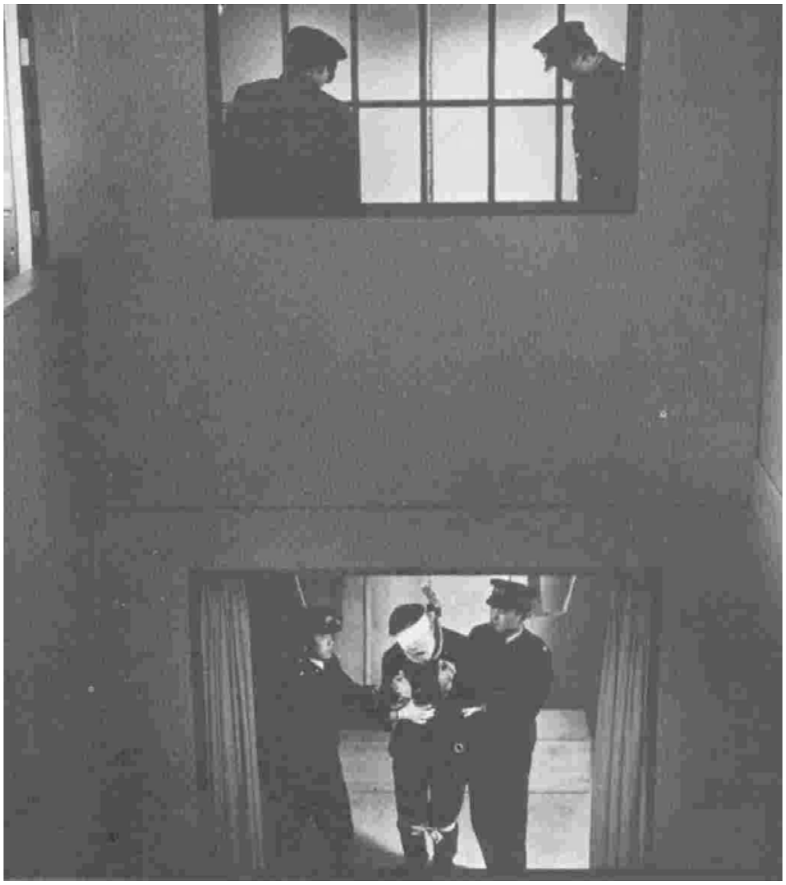
(Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy, 1953)

In one of Antonioni's earliest films -- an episode in Zavattini's *ove in the City* -- he interviews survivors of suicide attempts who then re-enact them in the actual locales. An example of Zavattini's insistence on "actuality" and non-fiction as the stuff of drama and consciousness-raising.

THE WAR GAME

(Peter Watkins, Great Britain, 1965)

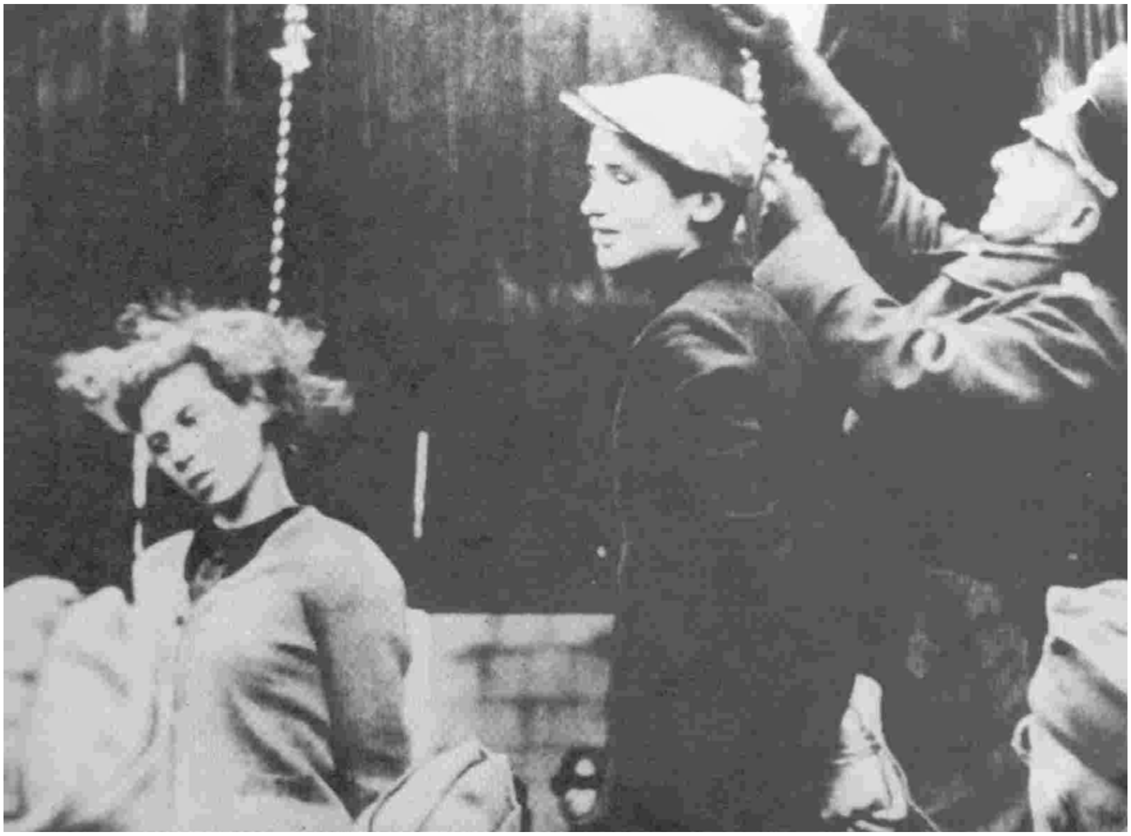
A terrifying "fabricated" documentary records the horrors of a future atomic war in the most painstaking, sickening detail. Photographed in London, it shows the flash burns and firestorms, the impossibility of defense, the destruction of all life. Produced for the BBC, the film was promptly banned and became world-famous and rarely seen. SC



DEATH BY HANGING

(Nagisa Oshima, Japan, 1968) (F)

Death by hanging: fictional. The strongly geometric division of this still into two separate components (causing a peep-hole effect) and its powerful contrast between black and white rivet attention on the pitiful and involuntary gesture of the condemned man, entirely surrounded by efficient, cold-blooded automatons.



ORDINARY FASCISM
(Mikhail Romm, USSR, 1965)
Death by hanging: real. An efficient and solicitous German officer strings up a young civilian in the East. Another, a girl, has already died, her eyes uncomprehending. The young man's slight smile may be due to shock. The recording of real death is always traumatic for the viewer.

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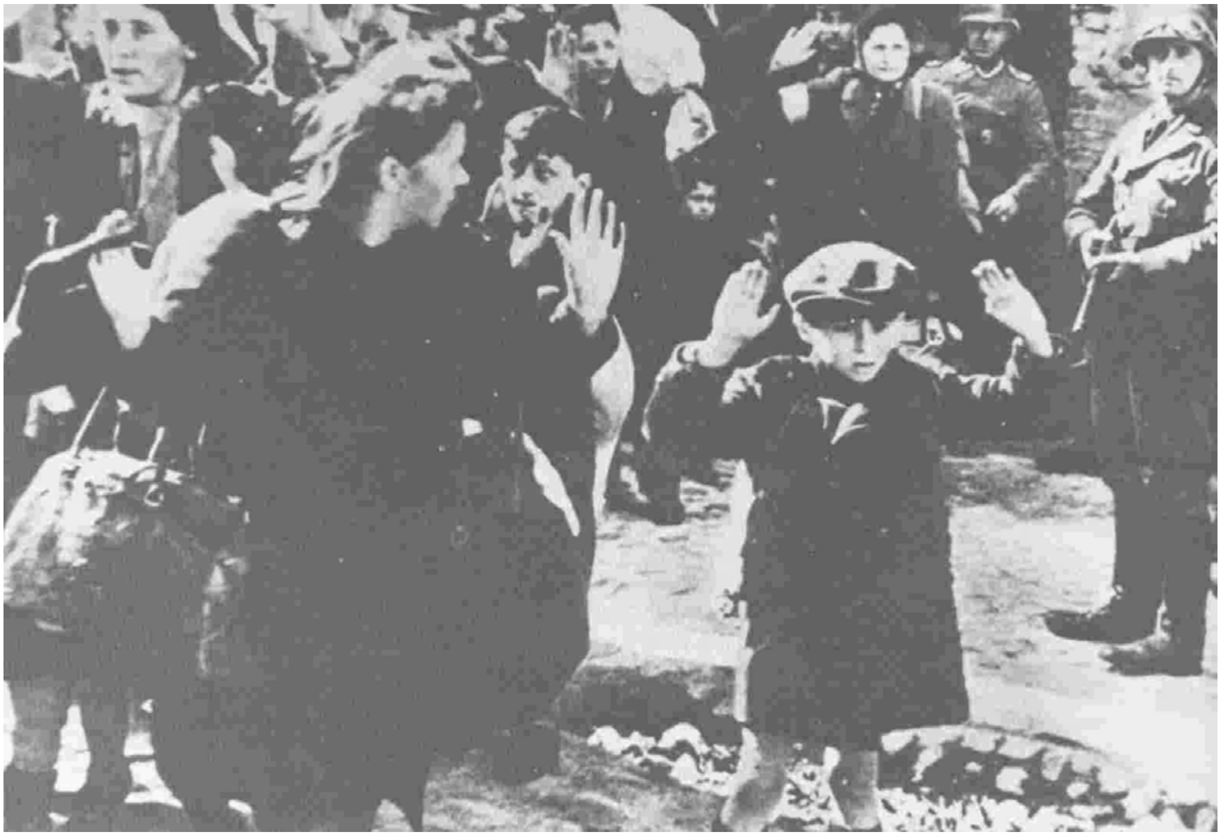
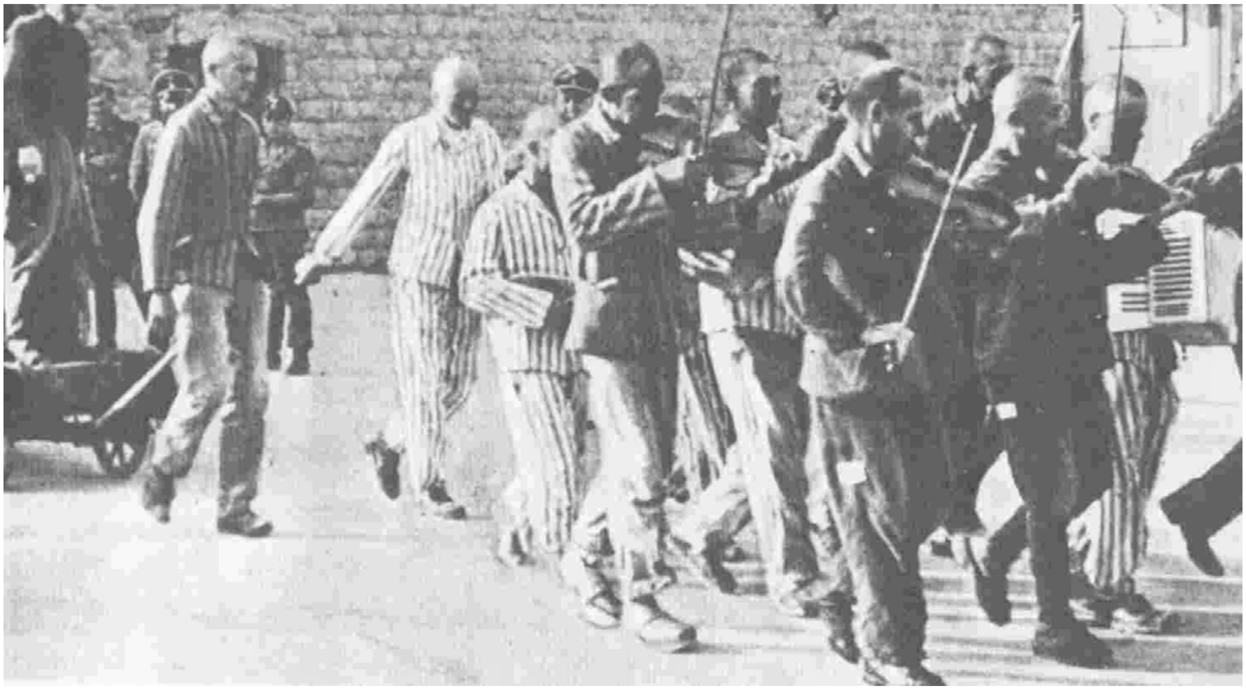


UNIDENTIFIED NAZI DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE
(circa 1942)
The start of the journey. Jews being rounded up in an East European town by German troops. The camera catches the immediacy and terror of a moment in time, repeated with the same ferocity in endless situations elsewhere: but it is the small boy on the right who has made this particular image live forever.

CONCENTRATION CAMPS

FILMS



UNIDENTIFIED NAZI DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE

(circa 1944)

The reality of the camps; on the way to an execution.
Only the Nazis could have succeeded in surpassing the
most grotesque nightmares of Bosch or the Surrealists.
The existence of these bands is a matter of record
in almost all camps; there is nothing human beings
are incapable either of creating or of enduring.

ARCHAEOLOGY (ARCHAEOLOGIA)

(Andrzej Brzozowski, Poland, 1967)

Peaceful woods, bird noises. A group of archeologists from the Polish Academy of Sciences begin their excavations in a leisurely, methodical fasion; as they progress and slowly uncover relics of the past -- tin cups, rusted watches, dolls, and combs -- a sudden horrible suspicion is confirmed: this is Auschwitz today, its "realities" transmuted into congealed history rediscovered by a new generation. Simple titles listing the objects found strengthen this persiflage of conventional documentary, created in order to shock and subvert.

A TOWN PRESENTED TO THE JEWS AS A GIFT BY THE FUHRER (MESTO DAROVANE)

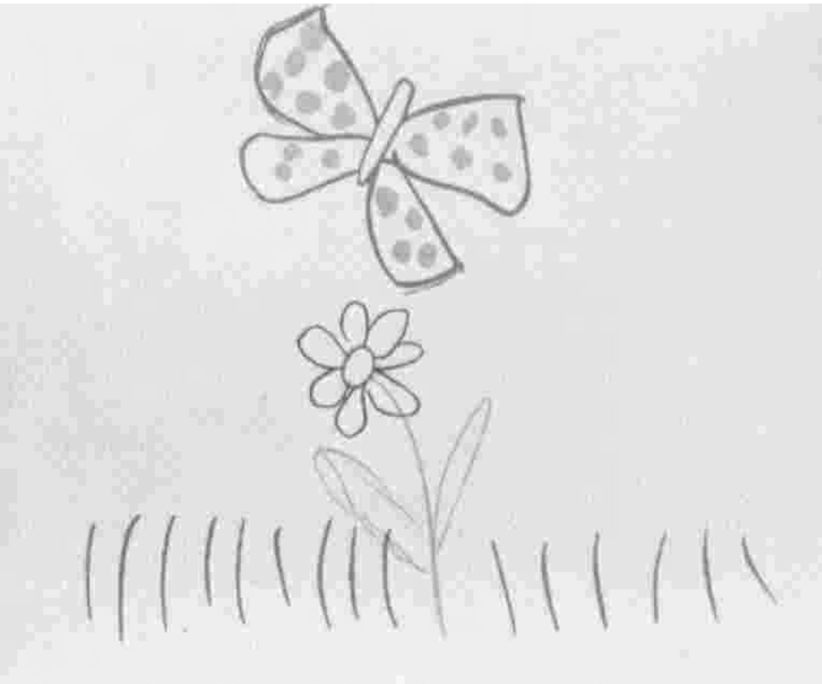
(Vladimir Kressl, Czechoslavakia, 1968)

An unprecedented historical document. The Nazi concentration camp of Terecin in Czechoslovakia was unique in occupying the area of an entire city, "presented as a gift to the Jews by the Fuhrer" in an obscene gesture. In preparation for a visit by the International Red Cross "to investigate conditions", the Nazis began producing what was to have been a 40-minute documentary film extolling the happy life of the camp's inmates and forced a Jewish prisoner, the well known actor Kurt Gerron, of *Blue Angel* fame, to direct it. About half of this unfinished film was accidentally recovered after the war by the Czechs and is incorporated in this instructive, horrifying object lesson of how "reality" can be manipulated and how false the "authentic" film image can be; for here, in this contrived documentary, we see the actual inmates of the camp-city at soccer games, listening to concerts, peacefully working at various jobs, tending their gardens in their spare time. It is difficult to decide what is more horrific, the "use" (by force) of human beings as actors in a portrayal of their lives that they knew to be false; or their constant, eager smiles to the camera (anything less may have meant instant death). "I like it here in Terecin," one of the inmates says. "I lack nothing." Within months, he and all the other hundreds of happy, smiling people in this film were exterminated. **SC**

CAMPS OF THE DEAD

(Allied cameramen, France, 1947)

As film record and historical document, this skillful and horrifying compilation of newsreel and documentary materials gathered by Allied cameramen upon their entry into the concentration camps in 1945/6, is the definitive work. In its portrayal of corpses, mass graves, decayed and martyred flesh, lampshades, severed limbs, living skeletons, it is also an example of the worst nightmares of surrealism overtaken by 20th century realities.



BUTTERFLIES DO NOT LIVE HERE (MOTYLI TADY NEZIJI)

(Miro Bernat, Czechoslovakia, 1958)

"Detail from drawing, *Butterflies*, a pencil and pastel sketch by Marika Friedmanova, born on April 19, 1933, and deported to Terezin on August 3, 1942. Twenty-three more of her drawings exist. She lived in building L410, House 13. Perished at Auschwitz in 1944." This is one of hundreds of drawings and poems produced by child inmates of the Terezin concentration camp, carefully catalogued by illegal prison teachers and accidentally rediscovered after the war.

A poignant and harrowing study of the paintings and poems by Jewish child inmates of the Terecin concentration camp. Produced in illegal art classes during their imprisonment, they were carefully identified by name and biographical note, hidden away by the teacher-inmates, and accidentally recovered after the war, years after students and teachers had perished in the gas-chambers; a document of our era. The title derives from one of the poems; its author died at the age of 12.

CHOTYN - 5 KM

(Igor Kolovsky, USSR, 1968)

In an unknown Russian hamlet, we meet a few old men who haltingly and with great emotion relive the destruction of the town and its population by the Nazis. The obvious sincerity and tears are unbearable; so are the endless rows of graves; but just as we become accustomed to the idea of "one" more town destroyed, a sudden map of Russia reveals the names of countless other hamlets that met an identical fate.

THE GAMES OF THE ANGELS (LES JEUX DES ANGES)

(Walerian Borowczyk, France, 1964)

This haunting and oppressive animation -- a masterpiece of modern art -- represents a daring attempt to portray not the reality of the camps, but their atmosphere, the "weight" of infinite fear and unknown horror, the presence of continuous and unforeseeable death. Ironically described as a "reportage in the city of the angels", the surrealist-expressionist images (reminiscent of both Di Chirico and Beckmann) take the unwilling spectator on a journey through a nightmarish world of metaphysical terror. There are oppressive cells with ominous wall openings and pipes, indistinct torture instruments, misshapen torsos locked in brutal, endless struggle, executions, rivers of blood running in false colors. A unique and original work that aims at changing the viewer's

consciousness by transporting him into an obsessively imaged recreation of what it must have been like.

DISTANT JOURNEY
(GHETTO TEREZIN)

(Alfred Radok, Czechoslovakia, 1948) (F)

Over the years, the stature of this unaccountably neglected masterpiece of the humanist cinema has been growing. An unrelenting epic of human suffering and degradation, it is one of the very few films that succeed in making the horror and inexplicable reality of the concentration camp universe comes alive. Intentionally intensified, non-realist film techniques (derived from both expressionist and surrealist tradition) are utilized as only they can cope with the enormity of the event. These "distortions" of reality reaveal its inner truth, simultaneously building up an atmosphere of nightmare and madness that explodes in final mass destruction.

I WAS A KAPO
(BYLEM KAPO)

(Tadeusz Jaworski, Poland, 1964)

For a new generation, it is a subversive experience to meet actual, living representatives of the Nazi terror and to realize, with sudden anxiety, that they are as "ordinary" as we are. Here a former concentration camp "trusty" -- now imprisoned for life in Poland -- recounts on camera how, upon entering Auschwitz as a young man, he became part of the Nazi hierarchy "in order to survive". He recounts his crimes (as do other survivors who knew him). He cries.

MEMORANDUM

(Donald Brittain and John Spotten, Canada, 1966)

With *Night and Fog*, this is unquestionably the most sophisticated film yet made on the philosophical and moral problems posed by the concentration camp universe. Twenty years after the liberation, a group of Canadian survivors return on a pilgrimage to a former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. A complex filmic structure, combining cinema verite and a constant mingling of past and present, records the result: a morass of paradox, irony, unanswerable questions; and a strong implication that it may be impossible to go back or to "understand". The camp has become a NATO base and a garden for Germans; the returning Jews are unable to live up to the presumably heroic role imposed on them and fumble;

an old German introduces himself as one of the 60,000,000 cowards who did nothing against Hitler; and we learn of Jewish collaborators, anti-Nazi Germans, NATO soldiers who have no idea of where or who they are. But the question hovering over the entire film -- unspoken, yet implicit in every scene -- is simply how, or whether, one can learn from the past.

NIGHT AND FOG
(NUIT ET BROUILLARD)

(Alain Resnais, France, 1955)

Resnais' classic, definitive study of the concentration camp universe is a searing meditation on individual and collection responsibility, a film about human forgetfulness, a reminder of a reproduceable past, an account of a cosmic horror, an archetypal, surrealist nightmare come alive. Based on exhaustive and terrifying documentary footage and shots of the camps ten years later -- the horror receding beneath vegetation as part of the inevitable "healing" of time -- it aims to shock into awareness "those who believe that this happened once and for all and in a single country and who do not think to look around and do not hear the cries without end." Jean Cayrol provides a cruel, poetic commentary that will live forever, Hans Eisler one of his most memorable scores. The constant transitions

from then to now presage Resnais' later work and serve to confirm that the horror the film depicts continues into the present and is, in fact, concurrent to it.

SIGHET, SIGHET

(Harold Becker, USA, 1967)

For once, a lifeless, single shot conveys the total atmosphere of a film. The blindly staring windows and storefronts, the black-shadowed trees, the unearthly light on the empty pavements denote a town that -- for one man -- has died. Elie Wiesel's hometown, from which all Jews were deported by the Nazis and to which he attempts to return, in vain.

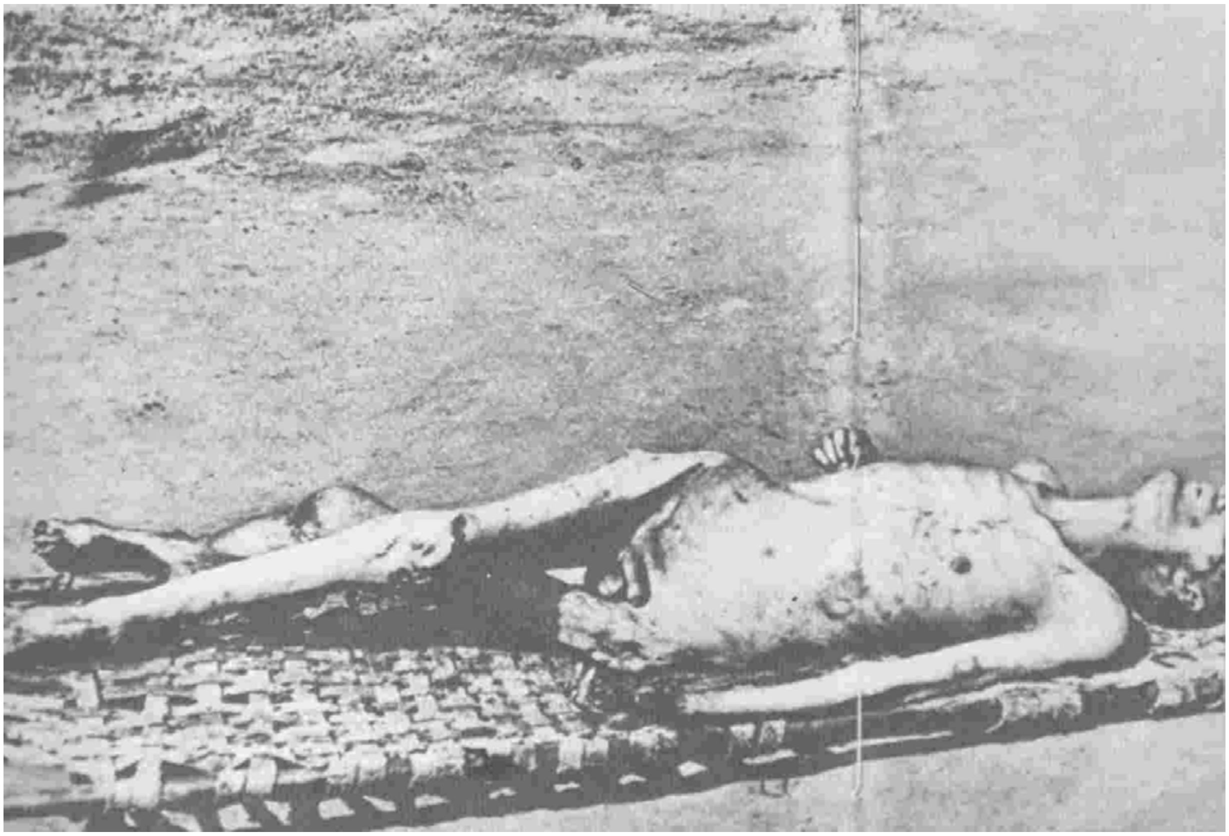
---

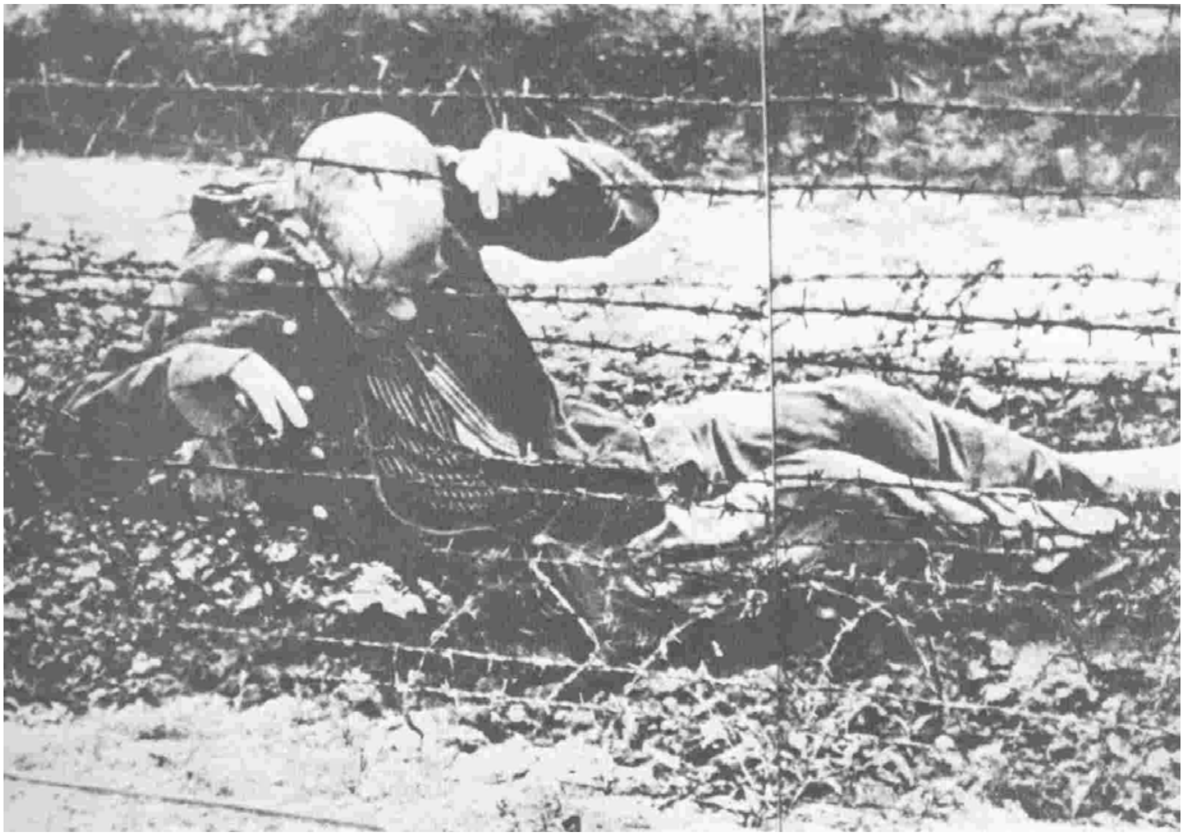
lie Wiesel, survivor of the Hungarian town of Sighet, from which a thousand Jews were deported to the ovens of Auschwitz, returns, unknown and unseen, a silent witness to the town where he was born and grew up. Life goes on in Sighet, the same buildings are still there but for Wiesel this normalcy is a lie; for the inhabitants he knew have vanished before their time and he realizes that he cannot "return".

WARSAW GHETTO

(Anonymous, Germany, 1943/44)

This secret Nazi film -- unforgettable documentary of a vanquished world -- was photographed just before the Ghetto's total destruction and either never completed or not intended for public release. For once, the Nazis -- albeit unintentionally -- revealed the truth about an event, though it was a truth distorted by their presence; the only Jews who did not know that they were being photographed were the dead; the others, depending on degree of desperation, indifference, or nearness of death, attempted to smile or otherwise co-operate with the photographer/director (representative of unlimited power over life or death), an obscene spectacle difficult to bear. The footage, by its very artlessness and the sepulchral absence of sound, exerts the most hypnotic and oppressive influence on the viewer; for this is a spectral parade of horrors enveloped by silence. While an attempt is made to pretend that life is proceeding "as usual" in the Ghetto, reality breaks through with a vengeance. A long shot of a shopping area with purchasers (to denote normalcy) suddenly reveals several festering corpses, with flies, lying unattended on the sidewalk; people pass by and no longer notice. Children in dirty cots -- their skeletal bodies mercilessly exposed by an anonymous hand turning back their covers -- stare at the camera wordlessly. Ghetto inhabitants are filmed with rashes, lice in their hair and dirty feet (in lingering close-ups), to show how filthy Jews are. The nude corpses of a couple, next to each other in strange intimacy, put on to a cart for disposal; one falls off, and is put back, re-establishing the bond. A child, dressed in the most surrealist rags, dancing for the camera and a piece of pretzel, with unaffected, innocent charm, unaware of her future, in total silence and to a tune that will remain unknown forever. A truck full of corpses, dumped by chute into a mass grave, with children tumbling behind women and men. Close-ups of faces (unbelievable faces) staring straight at the camera, undoubtedly compelled to do so, attempting to look normal and happy (lest they be killed on the spot), betraying fear, the horror of things seen, the nearness of death. Dying men on a bed jumping to attention as a piece of bread is offered; children with baggy clothes, roughly searched by German soldiers, "contraband" spilling out of folds, pockets, trouser legs -- carrots, more carrots, nothing but carrots. Death exudes from every frame of this film: death past, present, and future; all of its stars and extras died within the year, except the man behind the camera, his identity unknown. And here is an intriguing unsolved mystery: for in choice of subject matter, camera angles, duration of shots and editing, one discerns not only the cruelty of a Nazi historian "objectively" recording impermissible history, but -- this is a stab of sudden, uncanny surprise -- a note of compassion, of sympathy wrenched perhaps unwillingly from its source, indeed possibly unknown to it. The Nazis, after all, did not believe in the subconscious universe explored by the Jew Freud.





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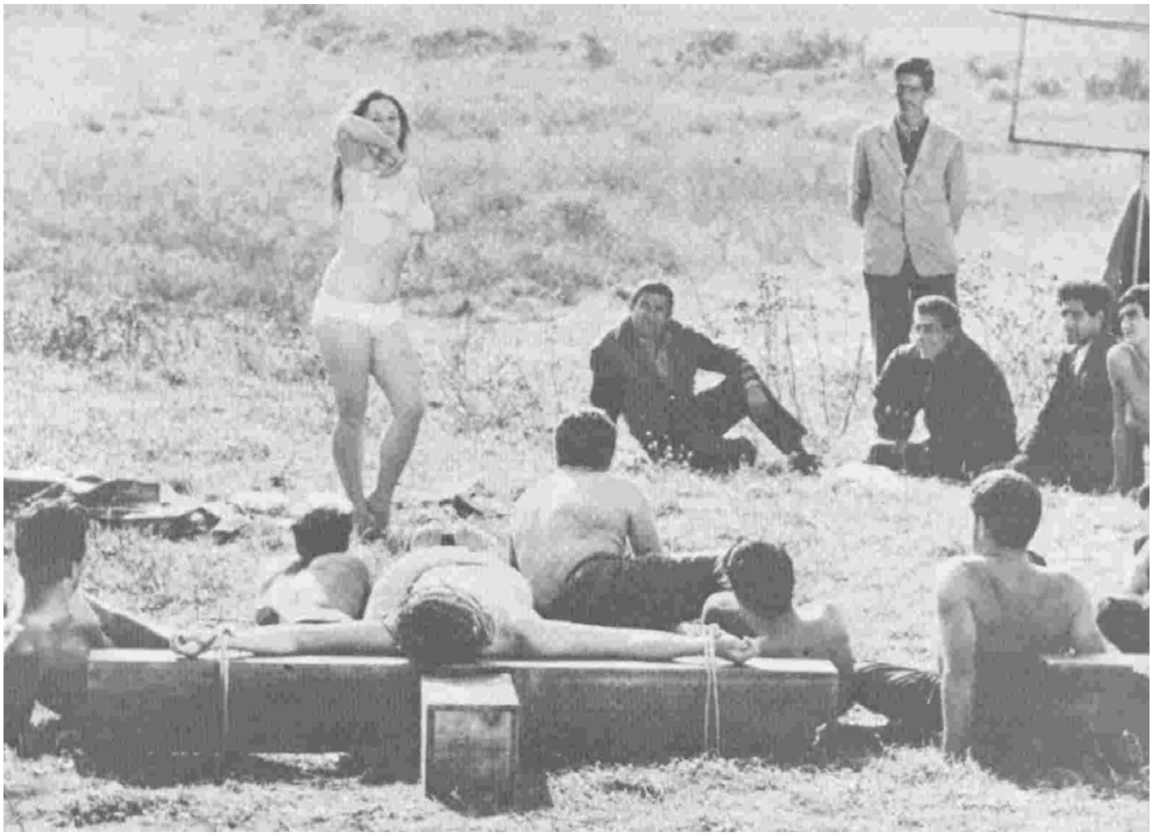


LA RICOTTA
(episode in ROGOPAG)
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy, 1962)

Pasolini's acid satire on pseudo-religion, banned by the Italian government. As we participate in the production of a typical Italian religious "epic", the cast, during a break, watches a strip by the actress who plays Mary Magdalene while a crucified Christ lies in the foreground. Stripper and Christ are themselves placed into a cross-like composition, forcing our glance to waver between one and the other. SC

THE ATTACK ON GOD: BLASPHEMY AND ANTI-CLERICALISM

Paradoxically, the relative absence of blasphemous films is due both to the strength of the religious taboo and to its irrelevance.

Film is so public and pervasive a medium that it operates under the closest supervision of state and clerical censorship systems (often abetted by the film industry's self-censorship regulations.) These laws -- aimed at protecting a *status quo* that is an intricate web of secular and clerical power relationships -- effectively prevent attacks on religions for reasons either of faith or commerce (the fear of antagonizing powerful pressure groups). Blasphemy is thus eliminated either after production (by prohibition or organized boycotts) or, preferably, before (the film industry's well-developed sense of financial self-interest magically coincides with religious propriety).

In America, the immensely powerful Catholic Legion of Decency -- until the 1960s virtually controlling exhibition patterns of certain films -- effected this by its own rating system. Its condemnations of certain works (constituting virtual excommunication of producers and exhibitors) appear, in retrospect, even more significant than they did originally and afford, by their sweep, a view of the clerical mind in action: one can imagine how anti-religious films would have fared, if one considers the nature and quality of some of the titles officially condemned: *L'Avventura, Virdiana, Smiles of a Summer Night, Los Olvidados, La Notte, Blow-Up, Knife in the Water, Repulsion, Breathless, The Married Woman, Jules et Jim, The Silence, The Pawnbroker, Woman of the Dunes,* and *Martin Luther*. *La Strada* was classified as "morally objectionable in part for all" because "it tended to arouse undue sympathy for immoral characters"; and *The Bicycle Thief* was classified as "containing material unsuitable for entertainment motion pictures."

Judging by the almost complete absence of sacrilegious films (particularly when compared to the manifold infringements on the sex taboo) one must conclude that the taboo on blasphemy is one of the most pervasive now operating in cinema.

But the situation is more complex, for at the same time another factor comes into play; the relative lack of interest in the subject among both audiences and filmmakers. Religion is simply not the order of the day as far as contemporary cinema is concerned.

There is, of course, no dearth of charming family comedies (especially from Catholic countries such as Italy and France) in which priests are portrayed lovingly or with good-natured derision; but this "humanizing" of the representatives of dogma, far from being subversive, merely makes the church more acceptable.

Films that deal with religion seriously (such as Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest*, Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*, films by Bergman and Fellini) are as rare as blasphemous works; the latter seem to have been almost exclusively limited to the classical surrealist movement.

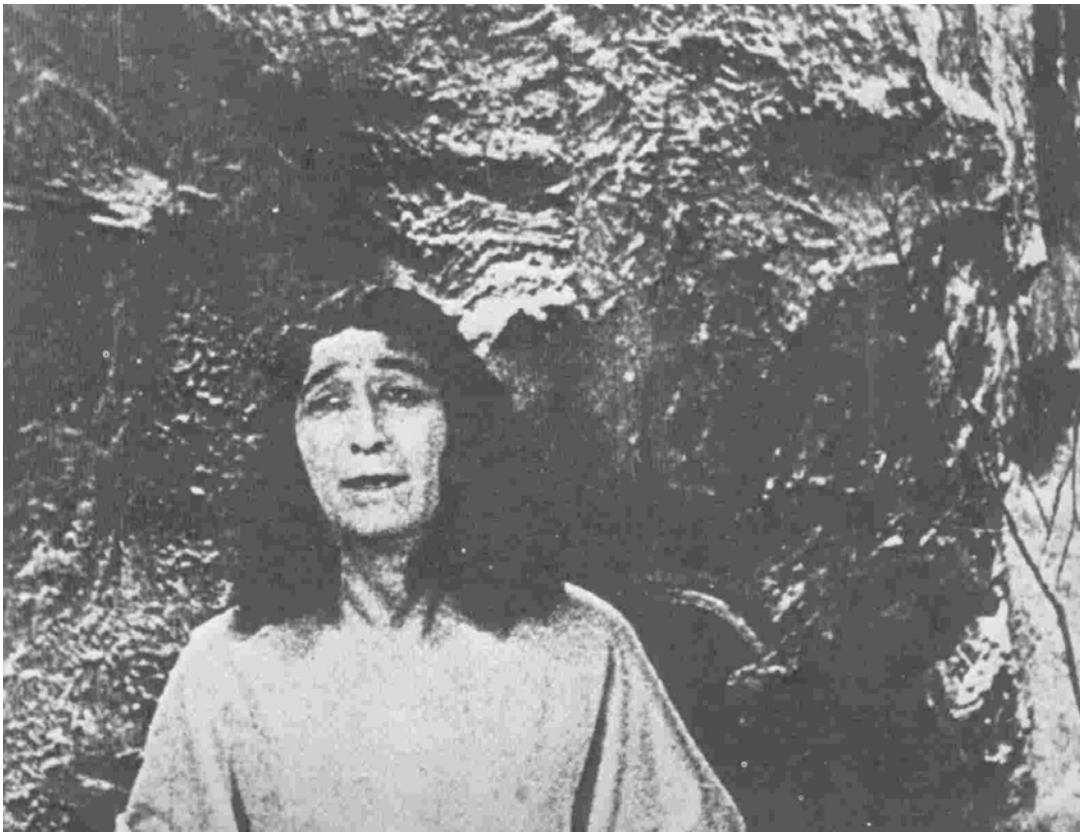
Significantly, they are almost entirely absent from the works of an avant-garde otherwise much concerned with questions of consciousness and values. Since financial or censorship restrictions do not exist here, the subject clearly lacks interest.

If there exists one persistently anti-clerical subversive in the cinema it surely is Bunuel; his continued insistence on this theme -- from *L'Age d'Or* to *Nazarin, Viridiana, The Milky Way,* and *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* -- dialectically indicates a continued involvement with his Jesuit childhood. The contemporary avant-garde, however, lacking the experience of a similar, intensely religious formative period, continues, with a few exceptions (Lethem, Marien, Nitsch), to be entirely unaffected by anti-clericalism.

There is one aspect of the problem that ought to be of concern to documentarians and avant-gardists alike, which has, perhaps not so mysteriously, remained uninvestigated; a study of the wealth and social power of the Church in the world today. Here the silence is deafening. One of the most powerful institutions of our day has remained, in cinematic terms, one of the most secret. Whenever hesitant steps were taken to investigate (such as Jack Willis' *Every Seventh Child*), they immediately led to effective counter-action or suppression. Documentary filmmakers, largely dependent on institutional, industrial, or governmental financing have been kept from such studies by informal pre-censorship (the killing of projects before they are born) or by self-censorship for reasons of self-protection; the avant-garde, erroneously considering the subject matter dated, has bypassed it; and neither Stalinists nor Maoists or Third World Communists have found it expedient -- for reasons of political strategy or lack of concern -- to make such films.

The reticence of these groups as regards God and His works remains the more surprising since, considering the state of the world in this 20th century, it seems advisablee to call into question either His omnipotence or His benevolence.

FILMS



L'AGE D'OR

(Luis Bunuel, France, 1930) (F)

The continued power of the religious taboo makes this "dated", slightly ridiculous image important by withholding it from public view; for here, at the end of Bunuel's anti-bourgeois and anti-clerical shocker, we are introduced to the "depraved monster" and "main instigator" of a 120-day orgy of debauchery and perversion: Jesus Christ. SC

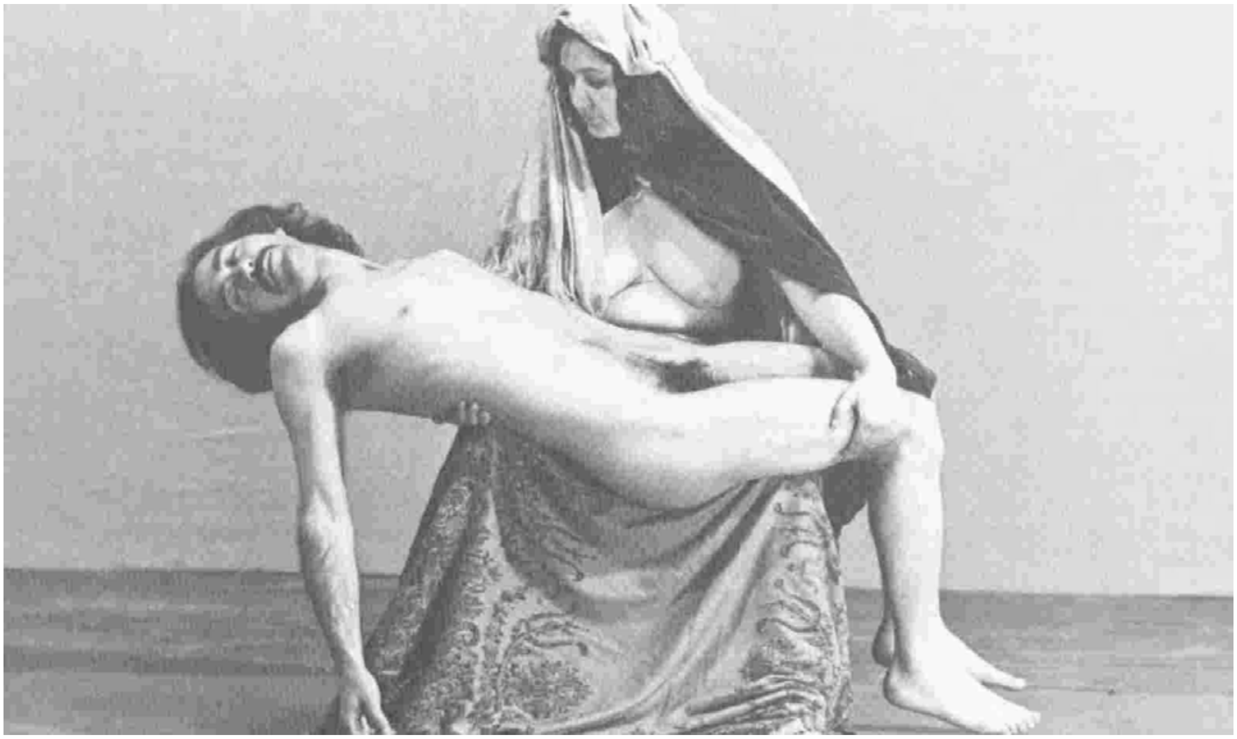
The two most famous surrealist works of world cinema, *Un Chien Andalou* and *L'Age d'Or*, were made by Bunuel at the start of his career in the space of one year. The second film, *L'Age d'Or*, is largely unavailable; its producer the Vicomte de Noailles, a convert to Catholicism in his later years, withdrew it from circulation as blasphemous. It is a work of poetic sensibility, mordantly anti-bourgeois and anti-clerical. Although, as Bunuel put it, its incidents have been freed of the corruption of plausibility, they do counterpose love to the fossilized institutions of bourgeois society. Among various incidents one recalls a raging fire at a manor party, with hosts and guests entirely unaware (comparable in Bunuel's latest, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*), an angry man throwing a giraffe and a cardinal out of the window, a passionate woman sucking the toe of a statue, a hero who kicks dogs and knocks down the blind, a gamekeeper who shoots his son, and invading bishops, soon seen as skeletons. In accord with surrealist ideology, only love -- wild, anarchic, irrational love -- is acceptable. Everything else is subverted; the rich, the church, the state, the military, as well as those pervasive bourgeois vices of sentimentality and romanticism, so offensive to Bunuel through-

out his life. In the final scene, a title introduces "the four utterly depraved scoundrels who had just gone through 120 days of the most unspeakable orgies, led by their Principal and chief instigator: de Sade's Duke of Blangis" -- who is none other than Jesus Christ.

ARCHANGEL GABRIEL
(ARCHANDEL GABRIEL A PANI HUSA)

(Jiri Trnka, Czechoslavakia, 1965) (F)

Taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, this lovely puppet film tells the bawdy story of the beautiful young Venetian lady who confesses her sinful passion for the Archangel Gabriel to a lustful monk, who promptly impersonates him in her bedroom with predictable results. Amidst the film's ribaldry, the hypocrisy and false piety of the monk are mercilessly mocked.



GOLDEN SHOWERS

(James Broughton, USA, 1970)

A new, however gentle desecration of the Pieta. The male could have come straight out of a painting, but the concreteness of the photographic image makes his complete nudity more controversial. The woman's pendulous breasts introduce a note of sly irony within the context of documentary accuracy.

CONSTITUTION AND CENSORSHIP

(Stephen Sharff, USA, 1953)

A very useful historical documentary of the American court proceedings against Rossel lini's allegedly blasphemous *The Miracle*, which resulted in the Supreme Court affirmation of film as being covered by the constitutional "free speech" protection clause and the elimination of "blasphemy" as cause for censorship. The protagonists -- civil liberties attorney Ephraim London, single-handedly responsible for this anti-censorship victory, and Hugh Flick, head of the censor board -- appear in person.

VIVA LA MUERTE

(Arrabal, France, 1971) (F)

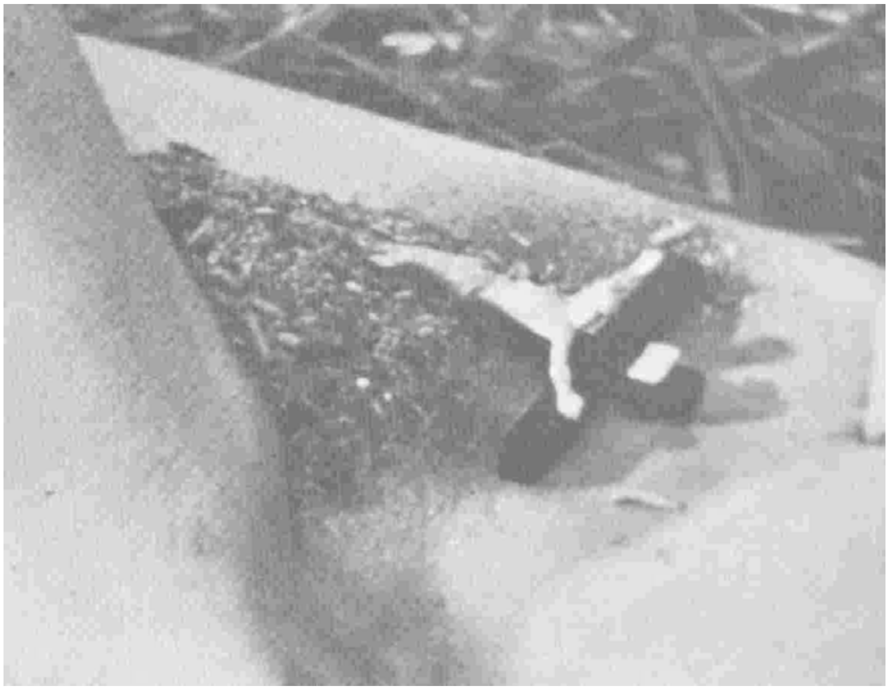
In very religious Spain, a woman masturbates in front of an open window; her foot almost touches, as if in defiance, the ever-present crucifix; were it not considered powerful, it would not be part of this composition. Other sacrilegious elements permeate Arrabal's hallucinatory film. SC

EVERY SEVENTH CHILD

(Jack Willis, USA, 1967)

It is significant that following its first and only appearance on educational television, this important documentary -- a discussion of the viability and relevance of Catholic

education in the United States -- immediately became subject to strong, organized attack by pressure groups and was withdrawn from distribution. It has remained unique: no other film involving reasoned (or even, possibly, critical) appraisal of Catholicism has appeared on television. The most fascinating (cinema verite) sequences show the specific indoctrination of 5-year-old children (!) with the concept of sin, coupled with exhortations to avoid sex and suicide as sinful.



LES SOUFFRANCES D'UN OEUF MEURTRI

(Roland Lethem, Belgium, 1967)

By juxtaposing several "hot" symbols -- female pubic area, crawling maggots, and crucifix -- a subversive filmmaker simultaneously violates three taboos in a visual comment on the conflict between Catholicism and sex.

L'IMITATION DU CINEMA

(Marcel Marien, Belgium, 1959)

This Belgian surrealist work consists of two films, one commenting on the other, concerning a young man with a crucifixion complex. Imagining crosses everywhere, he even cuts his fried potatoes in the shape of a cross. Unable to buy a large cross, he settles for sixty francs worth of small ones, which he carries of in a paper bag. When the cross he finds to crucify himself on proves too small, a kindly priest volunteers to nail his feed to the floor. -

J.H. Matthews, *Surrealism and Film*, 1971

MARJOE

(Howard Smith and Sarah Kernochan, USA, 1972) (F)

This deceptively humorous cinema verite study of a travelling evangelist emerges as a ruthless expose of an aspect of America's national psyche, with implications far beyond its immediate subject matter. Marjoe began by performing marriage ceremonies at the age of four (seen in marvelous newsreels of the time) and graduated to fame on the "Holy Roller" Pentecostal circuit, throwing women into convulsions, performing miracles, providing sex substitutes and mass therapy to the countless victimized poor and ignorant who flock to his meetings with their offerings. While the sequences of a prancing Mick Jagger imitation (complete with rock rhythms and brimstone) and of his huge and suffering audience in themselves constitute an impressive achievement of non-fiction cinema, simultaneous private interviews reveal the fiery evangelist to be a cynical atheist and hedonist, with contempt for his "work" and at best an ambiguous solicitude for his flock.

The revelation of mass manipulation by a charismatic, smiling con-man, the fervor and conservatism of the duped, the intrusion of questions of money and power over others -- these American preoccupations are brilliantly reflected in this outrageous, disturbing black comedy. SC

NAZARIN

(Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1958) (F)

A new, contemporary attempt at acting like Christ, turning the other cheek, and doing good unto others, does not fare well at the hands of man, as seen in one of Bunuel's most philosophical and clear-eyed works. **SC**

THE MIRACLE
(LE MIRACOLO)

(Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1948)

Anna Magnani as a dimwitted peasant girl who allows herself to be seduced by a stranger because she believes him to be Saint Joseph; pregnant, she decides to have the child, since he must be the Messiah. A serious and moving work, its American release led to condemnation by the Legion of Decency, a virulent and organized campaign against it, which included picketing, bomb threats, and Cardinal Spellman's diocesan condemnation lumping the film with "the greatest enemy of civilization, atheistic Communism". It is ironical that this campaign, by leading to the banning of the film by the New York censors, sounded the death-knell for censorship in the United States; for in 1952, the Supreme Court rescinded the ban, declaring that films, as significant media for the dissemination of ideas, were covered by constitutional free speech guarantees.

MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS
(MATKA JOANNA OD ANIOLOW)

(Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Poland, 1961) (F)

Considering its source, this film's attitude towards religion is surprisingly sophisticated and non-propagandistic. Portraying events in a 17th century nunnery supposedly possessed by devils, it subtly reveals sexual urges, guilt and sado- masochism as strongly related to concepts of sin and exorcism. A prototype of intelligent anti-clerical filmmaking.

THE DECAMERON

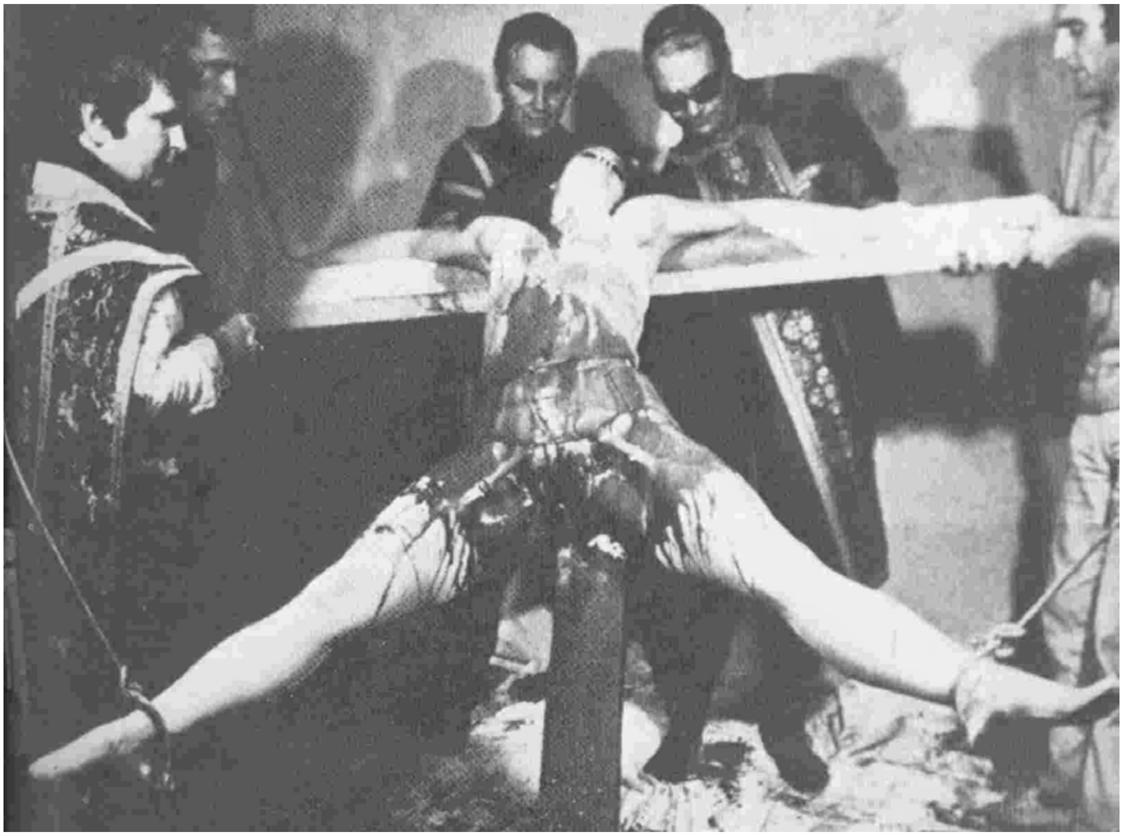
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970)

A young handyman, pretending to be deaf and dumb, allows himself to be utilized by assorted nuns in various interesting ways. Italian sunlight, countryside, and actors reinforce authenticity in this vigorous retelling of Boccaccio's stories; bawdiness and past tense soften the sacrilegious aspects. SC

A NOTE FROM ABOVE

(Derek Phillips, Great Britain, 1969)

A false message and its consequences: the ten commandments (received from God) are unthinkingly acted out to the letter in an ominous animated film. Unfortunately, the last commandment, by mistake, reads "Thou Shalt Kill".



MARIA-CONCEPTION-ACTION-HERMANN NITSCH (MARIA-EMPFANGNIS-AKTION-HERMANN NITSCH)

(Irm and Ed Sommer, West Germany, 1969)

A scene from Herman Nitsch's sacrilegious happening which combines cruelty, sexuality, and visual shock for ideological purpose; here a young women is "crucified" and defiled with a lamb carcass that has been disembowelled. The idea of redemption is intensified into pornography to offer a forbidden glance into our prohibited sado-masochistic impulses.

Since 1963, the German avant-gardist Hermann Nitsch has created a series of live happening, which (like Otto Muehl's *Sodoma*) combine cruelty, sexuality, defilement, and visual shock for purposes of purification, and "ab-reaction" of sado-masochist impulses. This is a film record of his most controversial creation: the crucifixion of a young woman, the disembowelling of a lamb carcass, and her defilement with it.

"By the act of crucifixion, disembowelment, defilement, and dismemberment of a lamb carcass the sadistic urge to kill and masochistic wish for self-sacrifice are substituted. Historically, these drives have found no outlet in culture and religion, the potentialities of the sado-masochist instinct being guarded by secret and prohibition. The substitute act of the lamb crucifixion is a brief, forbidden, lustful glance into this potential and serves as partial resolution of that connection with displacement which Nitsch also calls *ab-reaction*."

In the Maria-Conception-Action, the eroticisation and desublimation of the idea of redemption is intensified into pornography ... it complements the flesh of the lamb carcass with that of the female nude and is crucified allegorically like the lamb and together with it. The slitting open and evisceration of the lamb carcass corresponds visually to the opening and pushing apart of the vagina; the defilement and dismemberment of the lamb corresponds to the pouring over or covering of the nude female body with blood and entrails, and finally, to the sex act itself, which Nitsch -- again in an allegorically obscene substitute act -- completes with a godemiche."

- Peter Gorsen, *Sexualaesthetik*, 1972

THE NUN (LA RELIGIEUSE)

(Jacques Rivette, France, 1965) (F)

This blissfully domestic scene actually portrays an equally blissful all-Lesbian convent. By its very neutrality, it conveys the "secrecy" of this artist's style. Diderot's anti-clerical classic provides the basis for one of the few and certainly one of the most sophisticated anti-Catholic films yet made.

Banned by the censors, and *cause celebre* of post-war French cinema, this chilling melodrama is based on Diderot's famous 18th century anti-clerical classic. It traces the life of a young girl forced to take the veil, equating, ironically, the tyranny of sadistic cruelty with that of erotic love; the corruption of the convent with that of the outer world. A calculated artificiality

marks the film's progression from austere cruelty to luxuriant decadence. In its relentless portrayal of the doom of the innocent, it becomes a plea for freedom and tolerance far transcending the church issue. The supreme irony comes with the nun's final "escape" to a hostile world, prostitution, and death.

RAPE

(Wim van der Linden, Holland, 1966)

This beautiful example of far-fetched blasphemy accompanies a happy, ugly nun into the woods for her constitutional, replete with charming bird noises. Praying to and fondling a priapic mushroom, she is unaware of the evil rapist shadowing her. When the rape occurs, it is in long shot, hidden from view, under a huge tree. Articles of clothes and her cross sail through the air; the tree -- entirely dominating the screen -- sways rhythmically and repeatedly., A few minutes later it stops; then another tree, a few feet away, begins to sway in identical fashion. The rapist finally emerges, exhausted.

THE PILGRIM

(Charles Chaplin, USA, 1922)

The man to whom nothing human is alien, perforce had at some point also to subvert this attire, as he subverted anything that smacked of officialdom, pomposity, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. An escaped convict in this film, he promptly becomes the arch-cleric; but his orthodox seating position visually telegraphs his true feelings about the ministry.

THE SIN OF JESUS

(Robert Frank, 1961)

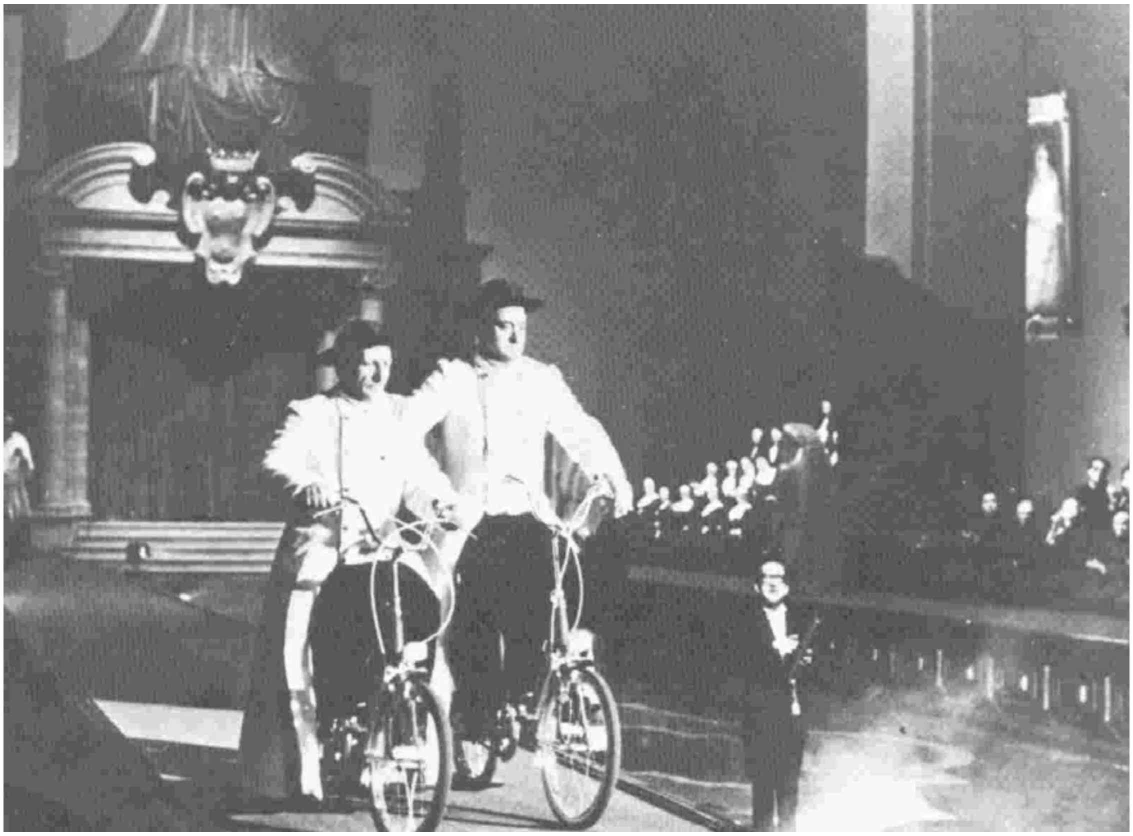
A poor, pregnant woman, abandoned by her lover, is given a young angel by Christ in his stead, but she destroys him on their wedding night by the violence of her sexual embrace. Christ refuses to help again, thus sinning against her fated humanness, and is refused forgiveness by her. A blend of stark realism and lyrical fantasy, this controversial work was adapted from an Isaac Babel short story. The humanization of Jesus is achieved in a casual, direct manner; the film's view of man's world is bleak. As in his still photographs ("The Americans"), Frank reveals mysteries.

ROMA

(Federico Fellini, Italy, 1972) (F)

A "swinging" clerical fashion parade becomes an expressionist parody of the commercialization and wealth of the Church, as Fellini, in his own flamboyant, baroque way, takes a very decided swipe at institutionalized religion. Compositional effects, as usual, are carefully controlled; note difference in size between the two cyclists, their perfect alignment and serious mien, all contributing to the satirical effect. SC

Though neither one's knowledge nor understanding of the city is in any way deepened by this film, Fellini has nevertheless created a dazzling display of visual cinema, an impressionist poem of Rome past and present, as seen through the eyes of an amorous observer. Hundreds of extravagant images are edited into a rhythmic crescendo. One of the most startling sequences is a satirical fashion parade of the most extraordinary ecclesiastical robes, an expressionist parody of the wealth, commercialization, and corruption of the contemporary Church. There are priests on rollerskates, sports clothes for clerics, choreographed movements of the models, golden vestments and flashing neon robes (revealed to be empty), a fantastic procession of skeletons and finally, the Pope -- "as if God", with music and light effects -- revealed as a puppet. Only a "religious" Italian humanist like Fellini could have dared create this sacreligious spectacle.



SIMON OF THE DESERT

(Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1966) (F)

Another in Bunuel's endless attempts to come to terms with what he abhors yet cannot completely abjure; religion and God. Here a modern saint, ensconced in penitance on a 30-foot-high pillar in the desert for 27 years, is repeatedly tempted by a delicious devil. Finally, he descends, and discovers a contemporary hell: present-day America in the last stages of its decline. SC

VIRIDIANA

(Luis Bunuel, Mexico, 1961) (F)

An immortal moment in film history; Bunuel's scathing satire of *The Last Supper*, enacted during a food and sex orgy of beggars and lumpen, invited by the ineffectual do-gooder Viridiana. Instead of saving their souls, she loses her own and becomes part of a seedy *menage a trois*. SC

Viridiana is a chilling and scandalous blasphemy perpetrated by a master subversive, one of the great directors of world cinema. This black and sardonic "comedy" recounts the undoing of apriggish, "Good Samaritan" nun who attempts to live out (and instill in others) values of decency and purity. She is duly elevated to a state of ambiguous liberation -- as participant in a *menage a trois* -- after her brutal rape by a lecherous beggar.

"The spiritual potentialities of this rape are incalculable, and given a libertarian-surrealist viewpoint, very promising." (1)

The film is suffused with subtle, forbidden images, often only hinted at to increase our participation in the act of desecration.

Leaving the security of the convent at the misguided prodding of her Mother Superior "to be nice" to her uncle, Viridiana arrives at his house with a frightening array of Christian tools of worship and purification that -- typical for Bunuel -- include cross, chain, crown of thorns, nails, and hammer. Their actual use is never shown; but the implication of religious masochism is clear, and further emphasized in a close-up of the uncle's personal cross: it opens into a knife.

The most ferociously blasphemous scene depicts beggars, brought to the estate by Viridiana to save their souls, using her absence for a food and sex orgy. Filled with grotesque, Goyaesque touches, it ends in the tongue-in-cheek "taking" of a group photograph by a woman beggar obscenely raising her skirt to "snap" the picture. At this moment, the film freezes into a still shot of the beggars grouped around the table in exact imitation of da Vinci's *Last Supper*, with Handel's *Hallelujah* on the track and a blind, hideous beggar in the position of Christ; an immortal moment in film history, combining pornography and blasphemy in scathing comment on the sterile "humanitarianism" of the simplistically religious.

The stupidity of the Spanish censors, Ado Kyrou points out, changed a mediocre ending into a sublime one. Following the rape, Viridiana, distraught, comes to her cousin's room in a confused, almost subconscious attempt at sexual surrender, only to find him with his servant-mistress, this time ensconced in a card game. Both women are taken aback; the man relishes the situation and invites Viridiana to join them. "I always knew we would have a game together", he says; and as the camera pulls back on a longshot of the three playing cards in a cosy family scene, we hear a blatantly vulgar, erotically charged rock-and-roll piece -- the first of its kind in the film -- commenting on Viridiana's final "liberation" into the pragmatism and corruption of bourgeois society. In the original scenario, banned by the censors prior to production, Viridiana surprises the pair in bed; the cousin has the maid leave the room, remaining with Viridiana while the maid spies through the keyhole. More power to the censors!

"Once upon a time", says Kyrou, "it was anti-clericalism and blasphemy; in Viridiana, it is atheism, total tenderness, lighting-like sympathy for men and things; this second attitude -- which does not contravene the first but simply goes beyond it -- is the more revolutionary." (2)

Originally heralded by the Franco regime as the oppositionist Bunuel's "return" to Spain, the film was banned upon completion, but some copies reached France and its 1961 showing at Cannes -- despite Catholic opposition -- saved this masterpiece for film history.

LA RICOTTA
(episode in ROGOPAG)
(Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy, 1962)
A scene from the religious super-epic being made: Pasolini's loving and meticulous recreation of the high-camp of Italian religious postcard art. **SC**

REFERENCES

(1) Raymond Durgnat, *Luis Bunuel*, 1968
(2) Ado Kyrou, *Luis Bunuel*, 1963

THE SUBTERRANEAN COLLECTION

FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

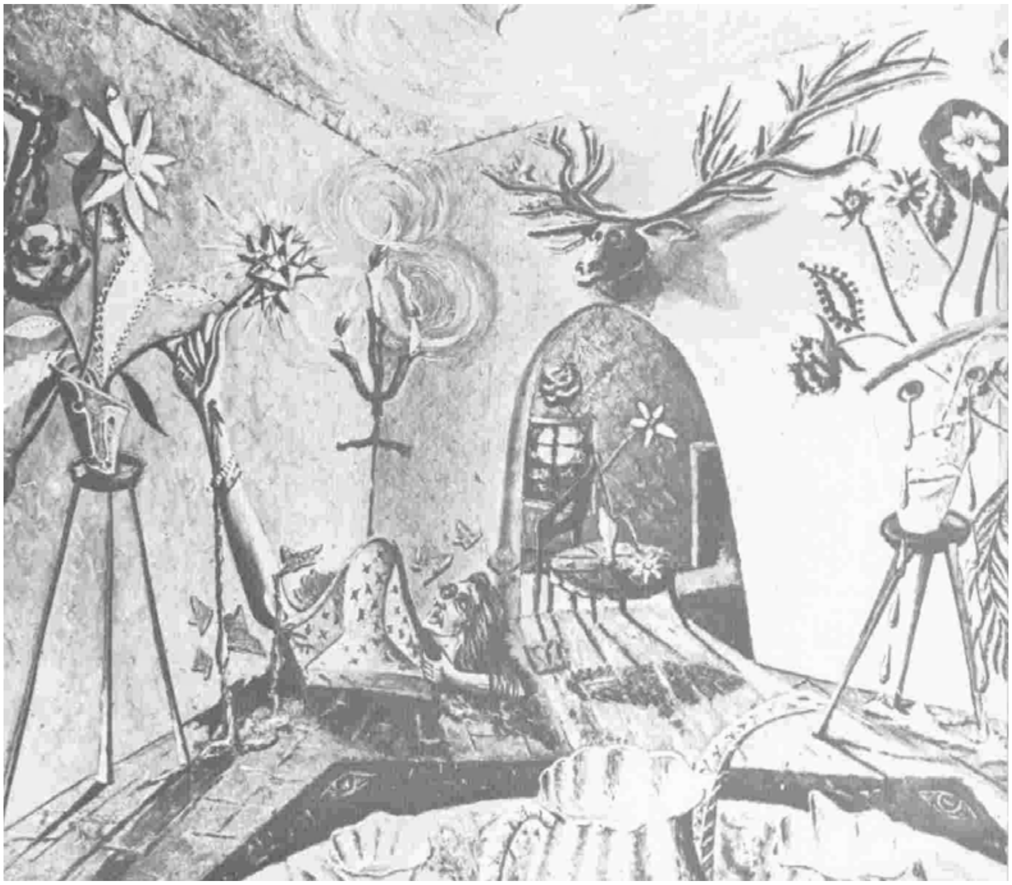
SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
- AS A -
SUBVERSIVE ART

WITCHCRAFT THROUGH THE AGES
(Benjamin Christensen, Sweden, 1922) (F)
This exotic curio is cited in all major histories of the cinema; banned and unavailable until recently, it examines witchcraft, magic and diabolism, recreates the witch courts, the devil's mass, the hallucinations and temptations of the age. The implied ritualistic violation of a woman are among its many disturbances. SC

TRANCE AND WITCHCRAFT

FILMS



IMAGES OF MADNESS

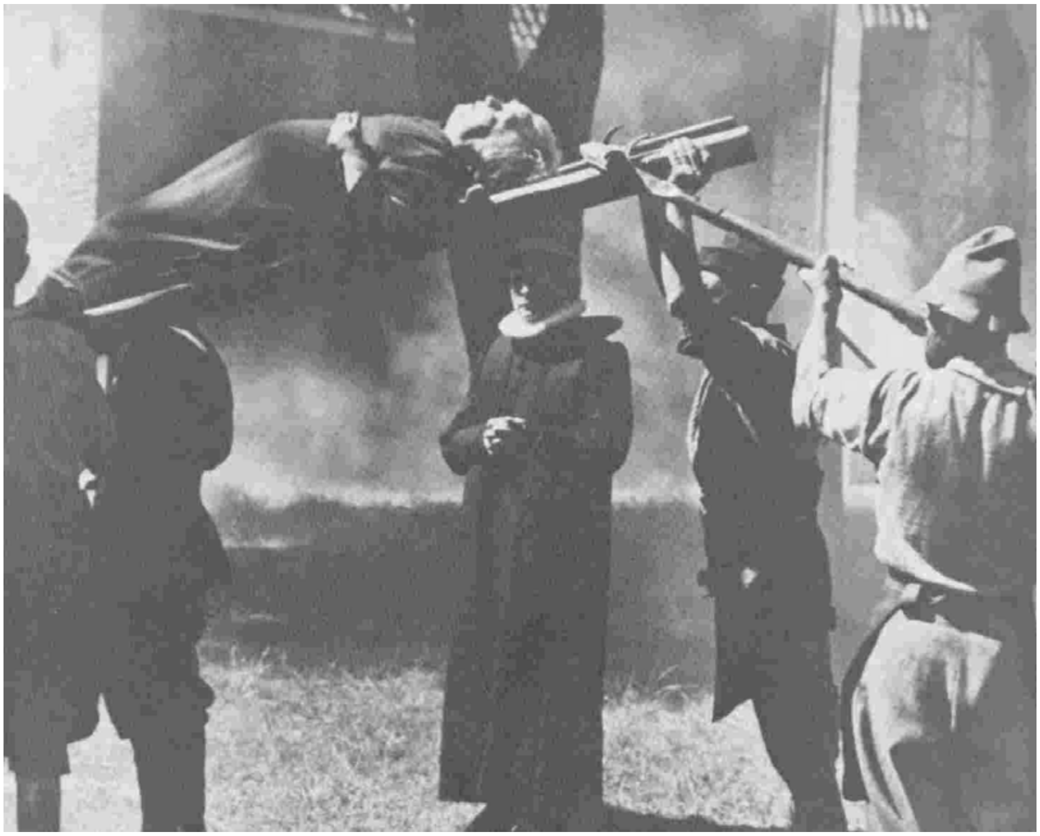
(Eric Duvivier, France, 1950) (F)

Converging and opposing lines, shades of Dali and Van Gogh combine in a flamboyant, nightmarish painting by a mental patient. From an unprecedented film document which, in drawings and paintings, takes the viewer through the universe of the mentally ill without explanation or analysis.

THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN

(Robert Wise, USA, 1971) (F)

The power of a visual taboo is shockingly proven in one scene of this film, when the wrist of a corpse -- killed by extraterrestrial contamination -- is cut open by earth people, and sand gushes out instead of blood. This substitution is not merely bizarre, but positively threatening to an audience entirely engrossed in the plot. The power of the "contamination" is, for once, not conveyed by horrific make-up, but the diabolic utilization of a visual taboo touching us on a deeper level and calling into question the corpse's very humanity. SC

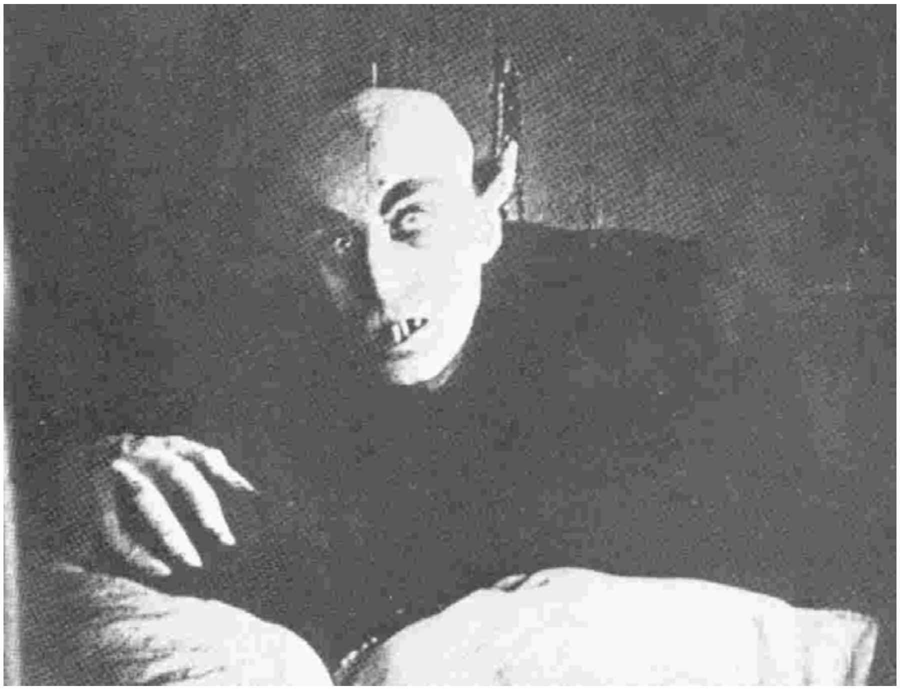


DAY OF WRATH
(VREDENS DAG)

(Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark, 1943) (F)

The "witch" has confessed and will be burned; here she is raised into the fire as the Establishment watches impassively. The powerfully controlled composition -- opposing diagonals, vertical tree in the background, placing of individual figures, ominous dust (or smoke) -- is photographed in long shot; though this "objectifies", the action involves us deeply. Only a master would have chosen this particular moment for humanist comments. SC

The masterpiece of a genius of cinema. A story of passion and jealousy under the shadow of 17th-century religious fanaticism and superstition, it represents nothing less than an attempt to subvert the subconscious of the viewer by a profound psychological penetration of the medieval value system, its dogmatism, repressed sexuality, and belief in witchcraft and sin. Its deeper subversion resides in its lingering implication that the real witches were not the poor souls who were burned but the upright, lifeless, dogmatic "good citizens", and that, once the system of values had been fully internalized by all, even the innocent, having been denounced as witches, came to believe the charges themselves, as under Stalin. Stylistically, the use of extended silences and ambiguity, the portrayal of states of being, and the poetic inflection of the whole presage the modern cinema and set it a standard of excellence seldom surpassed.



NOSFERATU

(F.W. Murnau, Germany, 1922) (F)

The misshapen ears and skull, the staring eyes and protruding teeth, the chalk-white face, the claw-like fingers, and open, greedy mouth: no matter how hard we try, we cannot remain unaffected. Murnau's masterpiece uses terror-filled images, angles, and symbols to heighten psychological tension. SC

THE BIG SHAVE

(Martin Scorsese, USA, 1967)

To the lifting accompaniment of a popular song of the 30s, this "brief American nightmare" shows a young man shaving himself ever more diligently but carelessly, until, among nicks and cuts and increasing blood, he finally cuts his throat and expires in a room full of blood. A not-so-secret attack on bourgeois normality. SC

VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED

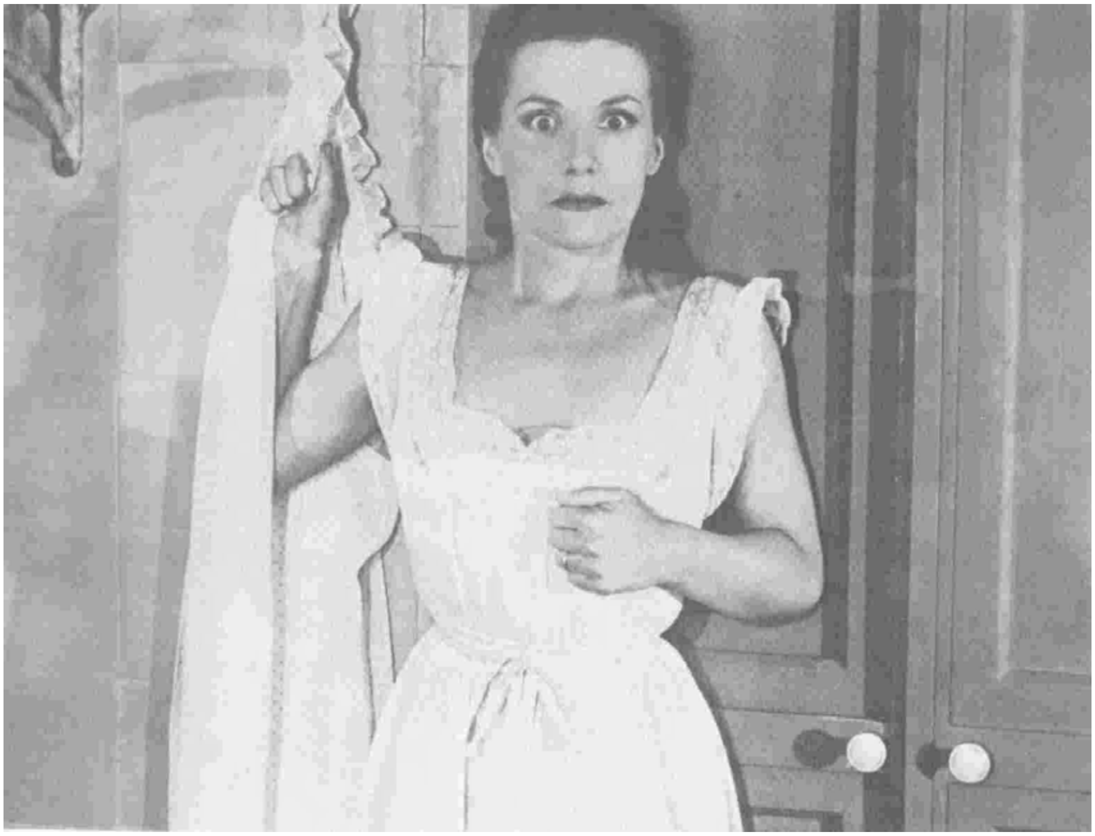
(Wolf Rilla, Great Britain, 1960)

A popular, forever terrifying device of fiction: evil where we expect innocence. In this significant horror film, a mysterious force paralyses an entire village and then impregnates its women who then bring forth emotionless monsters.

BITTER GRAPES

(Richard Bartlett, USA, 1968)

This black comedy contains cinema's most completely disgusting food orgy, as a man (assisted by a fake nun) gorges himself into a semi-comatose state, vomits whatever he eats, and finally collapses into his excretions in a cleansing of body and soul. An extreme, fully accomplished work.



DIABOLIQUE

(Henri Georges Clouziot, France, 1955) (F)

How simple it is to scare us! "All" one has to do, it seems, is to have the heroine open her eyes wide as if in fright. In one of the most horrifying films ever made, the terror-stricken murderess discovers that there is no turning back in her search to discover if the husband she has murdered can possibly be alive. The entire composition centers on her terrified eyes, and is reinforced by her placing against the verticals of the doorframe and the position of her arms and hands.

THE FIRE WALKERS (ANASTENARIA)

(Roussos Condouros, Greece, 1961)

This widely acclaimed ethnological film records a traditional Greek rite which, now Christianized, goes back to the ancient Orphic Mysteries of Thrace: walking barefoot on burning charcoal without pain or burning.

"One of the rare, perfectly authentic film records of possession; nothing was simulated; of inestimable value in the history of religions" (UNESCO)

As we "actually" see participants go through the rites of preparation, and then walk leisurely over the hot coals, we react in wonder and confusion.

ONIBABA

(Kaneto Shindo, Japan, 1964) (F)

In a time of war and revolution, two starving women live by murdering and robbing deserting soldiers. There is a horrifying scene involving a corpses' mask which, worn by the robber, cannot be removed; a hammer is necessary. A very potent blend of metaphysical horror and outspoken sex pervades this bizarre work.

GOOD MORNING
(OHAYO)

(Yasujiro Oza, Japan, 1960) (F)

It is surprising to connect the apparently gentle, pacific Ozu with the breaking of a taboo. However, in this, (his 49th film!), a quiet satire on Japanese suburbia and Westernization, there is a plot element unthinkable in Western cinema until Ferrari's 1973 *La Grand Bouffe*: an elaborate, noisy running gag -- encouraged by the eating of pumice stones -- involving a children's game of farting throughout the film. It is liberating to laugh repeatedly at this gag and, in fact, to look forward to it.

REPULSION

(Roman Polanski, Great Britain, 1965) (F)

As one watches this exercise in sexual psychosis, one begins to dread its progress. For Polanski plays on emotions too deep to sustain comfortably; a heroine who carries a decaying animal carcass in her bag, vomits when smelling her underwear, and is attacked by hands emerging from the walls (here seen in a production still). Ultimately, to defend herself, she must murder. SC

HERE COMES EVERY BODY

(John Whitmore, USA, 1972) (F)

A series of moving and revealing episodes from Dr. William Schutz's ("Joy") famed encounter sessions at California's Esalen Institute. As the participants, clothed or not, act out their fears and aggressions, a tiny portion of "the mystery" is temporarily revealed to us amidst the most copious flood of tears ever seen in a single film; how much sadness and need for warmth there is in us, and how assiduously filmmakers usually avoid real tears, an unacknowledged taboo of cinema.

PIGPEN

(Pier Paolo Pasolini, France/Italy, 1969)

In an ambiguous, medieval desert, a man crazed by hunger turns to cannibalism, as do others. A severed head is a profoundly forbidden image in cinema, the more so in this context. The man and his victim are already entering the grainy texture of the all-devouring landscape. SC

THE HOUSE IS BLACK

(Foroogh Farrokhzad, Iran, 1963)

Another taboo subject enters the cinema with this poetic and bitter glance at lepers, living in enforced idleness and imprisonment in a leprosarium. The commentary consists of montage of Old Testament texts and a detached, medical explanation. The film was directed by Iran's foremost modern woman poet who lived with the lepers for a month to create this terrifying, deeply humanist statement. The stream of mutilations of the human body -- and our frightened response, which may be more self-identification than empathy -- makes us repeatedly avert our glance from what we know exists but cannot face.

VALI

(Sheldon and Diane Rachlin, USA, 1965)

A modern witch in her lair. This entire bizarre work is "carried" by the charismatic presence of its star, who lives in Italy as a recluse with a donkey, a fox, five dogs, and a husband, engages in incantations, and tattoos herself and others. A romantic attempt at reaffirming a lifestyle of freedom and self-realization in an insane world.

INAUGURATION OF THE PLEASURE DOME

(Kenneth Anger, USA, 1957)

This film is a study in black magic, a startling and macabre evocation of an occult ritual; the convocation of the Theurgists and Enchantresses; the Feeding of the Idol, the Incantations, the Ceremonies of Consummation. A luxuriant, baroque oddity in the tradition of decadent art, this wicked film is a tribute to Aleister Crowley, self-styled Master Magickian of the 20s, lovingly performed by his latter-day American disciples. Anger's elegant, luxuriantly seditious imagery and exotic imagination stamp this as a brilliant work of black art, confirming the filmmaker as one of the true subversive iconoclasts of the cinema. SC

THE DECAMERON

(Pier Paolo Pasolini, Italy/France/West Germany, 1970)

In the commercial cinema, we are never even exposed to hints of human excrement; here, the hero is inundated by it. In search of an erotic adventure -- the story is taken from Boccaccio -- he has been cruelly sent into a trap. SC

LOOK AT LIFE

(Nicholas Gosling, Great Britain, 1969)

"An insight into matters and events often taken for granted" -- and never seen in the cinema; the protagonists of this wild, surreal work vomit repeatedly and actually while being photographed. Even the beautiful main titles are accompanied by the sounds appropriate to the subject.

WARRENDALE

(Allan King, Canada, 1966) (F)

A scene from one of the most appalling films ever made, photographed entirely in a home for emotionally disturbed adolescents. This scene portrays one of the taboos of cinema -- real (not fictional) tears. Both BBC and Canadian television refused to show the film as "too harrowing". SC

LE SANG
(BLOOD)

(Jean-Daniel Pollet, France, 1971) (F)

An apocalyptic vision of man after a cosmic catastrophe, this film is a terrifying metaphor of a dehumanized future. The Brazilian *Cinema Novo*, German expressionism of the 20s, and the ideologically motivated "cruelty" of a Bunuel come together in this ferocious work of a French theatre collective -- an ambitious, almost completely successful example of visual cinema at its best.

LES VAMPIRES

(Louis Feuillade, France, 1915) (F)

The guiding spirit of a secret crime syndicate in the most famous cinema serial of all time, rightfully claimed as their own by the surrealists. A six-hour orgy of evil, constant surprises, masked shapely criminals in leotards climbing vertical walls and escaping from impossible situations; an anti-establishment paroxysm with larger philosophical overtones. The sudden eruption of organized evil into bourgeois society is strangely contemporary.

SATURDAY MORNING

(Kent Mackenzie, USA, 1970) (F)

Ironically, it seems easier nowadays to see films of documentary sex than of documentary tears (undoubtedly because the former is more enjoyabhle to wach than the latter); this work, so full of real tears of self-realization and healing, redresses the balance, unexpectedly turning into a cleansing, liberating experience, neither depressing nor exhibitionistic. This is a cinema of experience rather than entertainment. The filmmaker, a product of the American documentary movement, places 20 California adolescents in a week-long therapy setting in a rural retreat; all action is spontaneous. After a series of innocuous interchanges, more difficult areas are touched; a girl, called upon to strike her "mother" (acted by another member of the group), cannot do so in a poignant moment of impotent hesitation, and bursts into tears; another girl realizes that she accepts all viewpoints because she herself has none; a boy discovers, among prolonged

sobbing, that one is ultimately alone. The sweet innocence of sex, displayed by some, is revealed as repression; seemingly real experiences emerge as frauds. At the end a black girl, who never gave love because she never received any, finally lapses into a silence of self-realization so total that it stuns. For staying with her face and ending the film in this manner, we must thank a sensitive filmmaker.

INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS

(Don Siegel, USA, 1956)

The usurpation of human minds by mysterious doubles from outer space becomes a pro-humanist statement in this classic of horror which depends almost entirely on innuendoes and "emanations". An attack on smiling conformists and unprincipled collaborators, a distrust of normalcy and appearance permeats this strangely political work. SC

LA TARANTA

(Gianfranco Mengozzi, Italy, 1961)

This is not a surrealist film, but a unique ethnological record of the seizures and maniacal dances of Italian peasant women in religious ecstasy; the progression of non-rational acts ultimately subverts the notion of a clearly intelligible universe.

FREAKS

(Tod Browning, USA, 1932) (F)

Our primitive fear of the deformed and the abnormal is deeply touched in one of Hollywood's rare "films noir" -- a macabre tale which raises the viewer's disquiet to the level of anxiety. Here Schlitzie, the famous "pinhead", appears in her "majic act". SC

SELECTIVE SERVICE SYSTEM

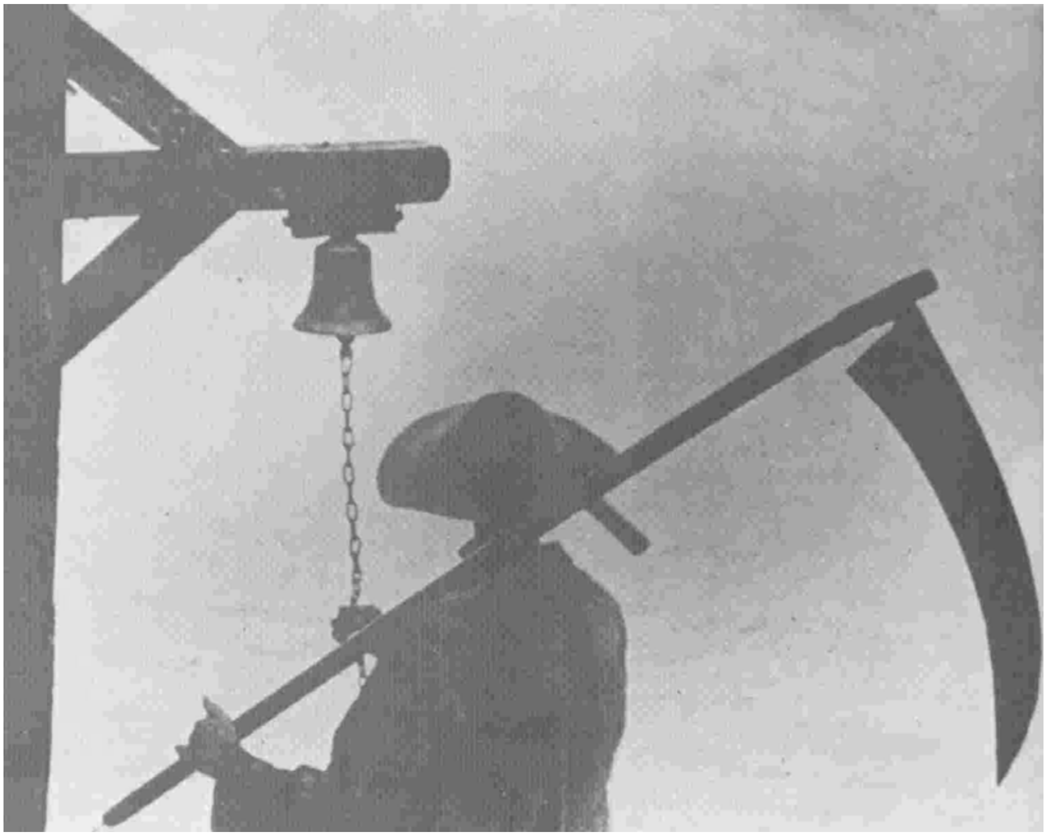
(Warren Haack, USA, 1970)

One of the most shocking documentary films ever made. A young anti-war American, to avoid the draft, calmly aims a rifle at his foot and shoots. For several endless minutes, he thrases about the floor in unbearable pain, in his own blood. The filming continues. "There was no attempt to alter the proceedings that took place."

VAMPYR

(Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark, 1931)   (F)

Form and content are fused in this hallucinatory attempt to force us into the oppressive horrors of a world dominated by vampires. As the hero searches for glimpses of rationality and understanding, even ordinary surroundings are transformed into anxiety-ridden symbols; no one who has seen this film will ever forget these mysterious shadows and chains. SC



VAMPYR

(Carl Theodor Dreyer, Denmark, 1931) (F)

A farmer advising the ferry "on the other side" that he is ready to board it, becomes the basic image of death. The severe composition -- vertical counter-balanced by opposing pairs of parallel diagonals -- is typical of Dreyer's genius. To become universal, the figure, appropriately, must remain anonymous. SC

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WOODSTOCK

(Michael Wadleigh and Bob Maurice, USA, 1970) (F)

Some day, Woodstock 1968 will be celebrated as the first of many manifestations of a more human society yet to come. For, despite the wails of their elders, it represented the aspirations of a defiantly romantic counter-movement, with rock -- its own music -- expressing the new lifestyle. This still reflects it: casual disorder, non-conformism, a new attire, a closeness to nature, informality -- and love. A romantic, utopian, and necessary vision if man is to survive. SC

COUNTERCULTURE AND AVANT-GARDE

The decade of the 60s has seen the beginning of a new kind of

subversion which, despite its smiling gentleness and all-accepting love, may possibly constitute a grave and comprehensive threat to organized society. It is possible that future generations will view the rise of the Counterculture movement -- Woodstock, the Beatles, Zen Buddhism, the flower children, communes, and free schools -- as the beginning of the new radical politics of the latter 20th century. For here the young have declared their independence from received wisdom and "immutable" patterns (such as competitiveness, violence, and the desire for bourgeois living), creating their "alternative lifestyles" with a gusto and consistency that unites -- as does the avant-garde in art -- form and content and hence becomes doubly dangerous. Those who mistakenly believe that the setbacks this movement has suffered and the relative "quietitude" of the bodypolitic signal its end have many surprises in store; for the causes that originally triggered the youth and student revolution -- unbridled technology, depersonalization, the coldness of the computer age, the boredom of affluent consumer society, the insipidness of the rat-race -- continue to exist in increasingly threatening forms and will, in turn, engender new oppositional waves.

The brave and innocent attempts of this counterculture to reintegrate man with nature and his fellows, to return "flowers" and "love" to the arena of human discourse, to proclaim acceptance of all that exists and the oneness of individual and cosmos, do not represent a romantic return to Rousseau, but an imperative necessity if man is for the first time to recognize himself as such so as to survive. In their driving rock music, their sensitivity sessions, their experiments with mind-expanding drugs, their gentleness and avoidance of power; in their acceptance of sexuality in all its forms, their striving for full equality of the sexes, their rejection of profit motive and socially useless work; in their opposition to war and injustice, their love-ins and gay liberation fronts, their extraordinarily beautiful new attires, hair styles, beads and new modes of speech, they have turned their backs on society as now organized and are groping their way towards a new type of communal or at least "related" group living located at the opposite pole of bourgeois individualism. In fact, this movement has been unique in combining the social zeal of the political radicals with a full-scale attack on their bourgeois valuesystem, including their moribund puritanism and interest in privilege and power.

There are failures and pitfalls as the ideology, no longer contained in ossified political documents, is being evolved while it is being lived. There are defeats and there will be more, since these new gentle fighters are as yet powerless and may, in fact, never succeed in turning society around. But the attempt is being made -- in the West as well as the East, as 1968 proved.

The movement constitutes the first attempt to integrate the world of Einstein, Freud, and Marx into a consistent whole and to relate the mysticism of the East and of Norman O. Brown and Laing with a rationalism that knows its limitations. It is Marcuse's historic attempt to integrate psycho-analysis and Marxism, Eros, and political struggle that has placed him in a leading position in a movement that no longer accepts the need

for leaders, but, like Rosa Luxemburg, considers their historical task to be to make themselves unnecessary. If we seem to have come to the end of the period of 1968, it is only the end of a first chapter, with the evolution of these ideologies to be reassumed on a higher level at a later time.

It is particularly their much maligned "cosmic" attitude that corresponds so precisely to man's now more clearly recognizable position within an infinite, monstrously indifferent, magically challenging universe. The idiocies of national sovereignty, relics of an earlier stage of humanity's development, must make way not only for world citizenship -- and the abolition of national wars -- but for citizenship in the cosmos. This is Einstein's ultimate and most revolutionary message to future generations. This realization of the "cosmic" is possibly the central core of the movement and comes from the most disparate and unexpected sources; "Thre is a certain point for the mind", said Andre Breton in his Second Surrealist Manifesto of 1930, "from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low cease being perceived as contradiction. (1) William Irwin Thompson, in his *At the Edge of History*, refers to the rise of a new "planetary consciousness" and this is certainly manifested in the science fiction novels of Olaf Stapleton, Ray Bradbury, C.S. Lewis, and Arthur C. Clarke; Buckminster Fuller's philosophical-poetic realization of earth as a spaceship travelling through the cosmos; Shklovskii and Sagan's *Intelligent Life in the Universe*; (2) and the utterly fantastic yet highly scientific studies and speculations by the world's leading cosmologists in A.G.W. Cameron's *Interstellar Communication*. (3) It connects with an acceptance of death as part of cosmic existence going back to Santayana's statement that "He who, while he lives, lives in the eternal, does not live longer for that reason. Duration has merely dropped from his view; he is not aware of or anxious about it; and death, without losing its reality, has lost its sting. The sublimation of his interest rescues him, so far as it goes, from the mortality which he accepts and surveys." (4) It also relates to the memorable passage in Hesse's *Demian*, in which oceanic consciousness is portrayed in poetic terms: "The surrender to nature's irrational, strangely confused formations produces in us a feeling of inner harmony with the force responsible for these phenomenon ... the boundaries separating us from nature begin to quiver and dissolve ... we are unable to decide whether the images on our retina are the result of impressions coming from without or from within ... we discover to what extent we are creative, to what extent our soul partakes of the constant creation of the world. (5) It is too simple to characterize this attitude -- which, like that of the oriental mystics, invokes sex and orgasm as a means toward the achievement of the "oceanic feeling of non-existence and loss of personal identity" (6) -- as a mere return to religiosity and anti-rationalism; instead; it attempts to reunite man in all his polarities and to undo the separation of mind and feeling.

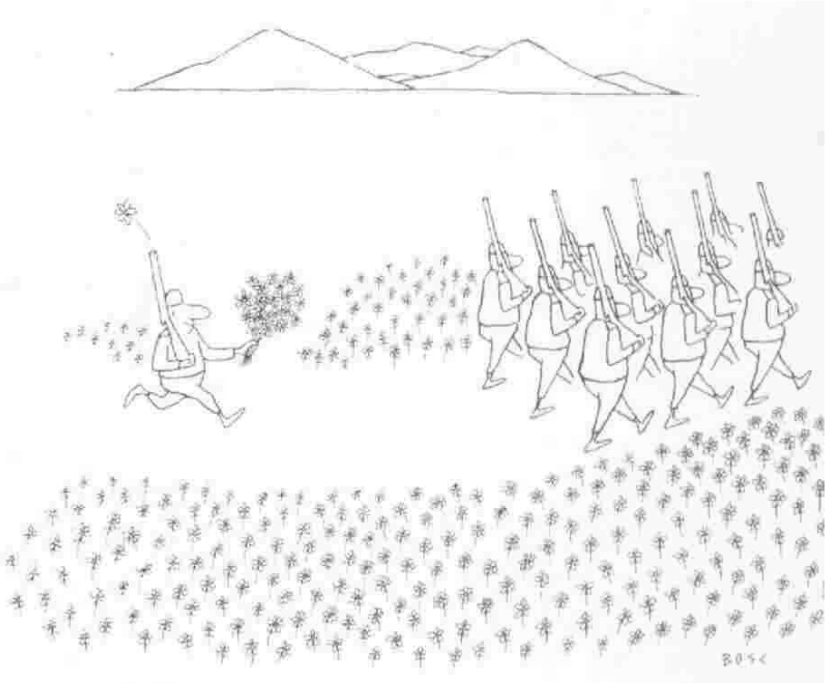
The basic intention of subversive cinema -- the subversion of consciousness -- is now attempted in films that experiment with new forms and contents and aim not to humor the viewer but to involve him. They may range from simple documentations of the new lifestyles or communes to personal declarations of faith and to the most original evocations of the new values. As usual, it is

the international film avant-garde that takes the lead, and those marginal works of the commercial cinema that at times come close to it. The avant-garde offers no solutions or programmatic statements, but a series of intricate challenges, hints, and coded messages, subverting both form and content. In this fundamental sense, it is by definition both an aesthetic and a political movement. Its achievement lies in its continuing and inevitable creating "desecration" of the medium, leaving nothing undisturbed, taking nothing for granted. In its works, film is sacked, atomized, caressed, and possessed in a frenzy of passionate love; neither emulsion, exposure, lighting, film speed, or developing, nor rules of editing, camera movement, composition, or sound, are safe from the onslaught of the poets who have irrevocably invaded the cinema. By restoring the primacy of the visual element, this movement brings us face to face with the essence of the medium, this inexplicable mystery of the image. Its god is Eisenstein rather than Shakespeare. The literary origin and form of commercial cinema -- tied to narrative structures and naturalistic soundtracks, to which the images are subsidiary -- is discarded. If, in Hans Richter's words, contemporary commercial cinema represents a 19th century realist art, I that of the counterculture is a desperate attempt to break through to our time.

REFERENCES

(1) Andre Breton, quoted in *Age of Surrealism*, 1960
(2) I.S. Scklovskii and Carl Sagan, *Intelligent Life in the Universe*, 1968
(3) A.G.W. Cameron, *Interstellar Communication*, 1963
(4) Walter Sullivan, *We Are Not Alone*, 1964 (5) Herman Hesse,
***Demien*, 1969 (6) Alex Comfort, *Darwin and the Naked Lady*, 1961**

FILMS



JOURNEY TO BOSCAVIA

(Bosc, France, 1960)

As usual, it is the nonconformist who has the best ideas. In this anti-militarist animation, the French cartoonist Bosc anticipates the flower generation. The outsider is the only one who displays a human emotion.

ALLURES

(Jordan Belson, USA, 1961)

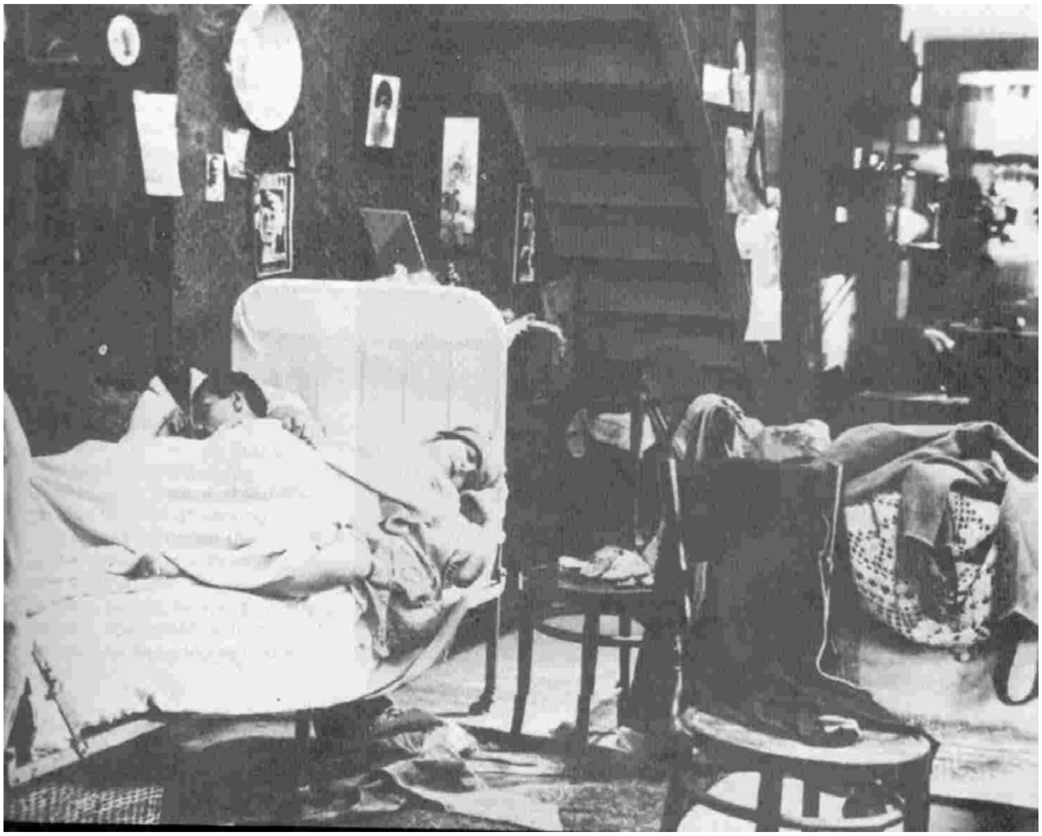
One of the most ravishing abstract animations by the master of "cosmic" cinema, this film pulsates with concentric, exploding mandala-like forms -- continual intimations of a pantheist universe and of all matter and forms flowing endlesslyinto each other. The other-worldly images are artistic transformations of actual, yet unrecognizable objects. Peace, acceptance, oneness is the implicit message.

APOTHEOSIS

(John Lennon, Great Britain, 1970)

In a snowy landscape, the camera pulls back slowly to reveal Yoko Ono and John Lennon in the square of a little rustic town; it continues retreating and simultaneously rising into the sky,mounted on a balloon that remains invisible throughout. Dogs bark, there are voices. The surroundings of the town come into view, then a panorama of the entire region; suddenly, blankness for five minutes -- an unbearably long period in the cinema. When all hope is gone, the screen bursts into a pink explosion of sky, sun, and cloud tops; the camera had risen

(in real, not screen time) through an enormous cloud band, and had passed, by means of minimal art, from separateness to oneness with theworld, "rising into heaven" in a beautifully romantic, purely visual metaphor of spiritual ascension.



BED AND SOFA (TRETYA MESHCHANSKAYA)

(Abram Room, USSR, 1927)

A whiff of counterculture overhangs one of the most charmingly humanistic stills of the early Soviet cinema; a truly "lived-in" room, filled with pictures, plants, the disorder of passion, the warmth and softness of the couple, heads in delicious counterpoint to their union, a pretty knee impudently protruding. Equally unorthodox was the film's portrayal of very informal sex mores in early Soviet Russia.

This almost legendary "lost" masterpiece of the Soviet cinema, hampered by its subject matter, has suffered from even more restricted circulation than other Russian films. A masterpiece of psychological realism, its sexual triangle (cause by the post-revolutionary housing shortage) involved husband and lover changing place on bed and sofa, until the pregnant woman, tired of male chauvinism, decides to leave them both. The film is unique in its emphasis on the individual rather than class and its portrayal of unconventional sexual mores in early Soviet Russia; it reflects, in its anti-puritanical humanism, the atmosphere of the early revolutionary days far more accurately than some of the large-scale propagandist works of the period. Entirely incongruously, but in accord with Stalin's new policy, it contains a crude anti-abortion message.

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

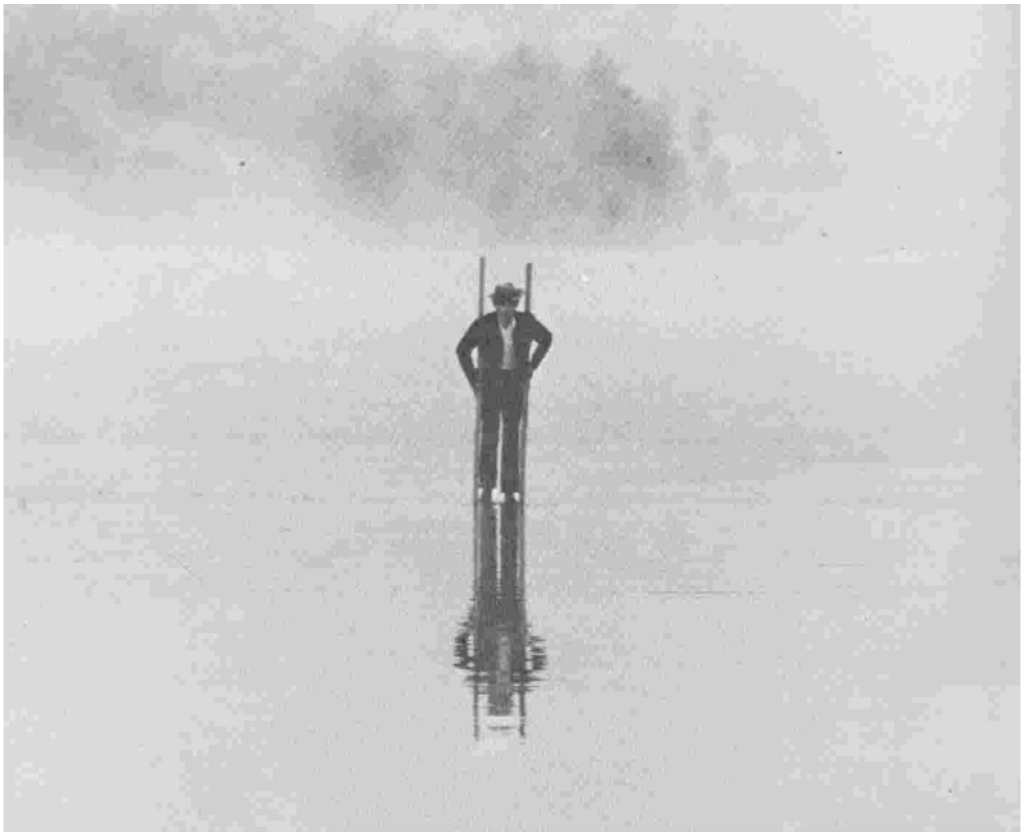
(Jack Arnold, USA, 1957) (F)

Close-ups can be deceptive: this man is about an inch tall and leans against the wire mesh of a small casement window. Having continuously shrunk throughout this haunting film and survived a thousand crises, he now seems ready for a happy end; it comes, but in a way that has made this work a memorable cult film of the new pantheists; for, shrinking further and literally disappearing into the vegetation outside, the man at last understands that he gained freedom only by becoming small enough to pass throughthe previously impregnable wire; and that -- by shrinking into "nothingness" -- he is now to be one with all that exists.

BREATHING TOGETHER: REVOLUTION OF THE ELECTRIC FAMILY

(Morley Markson, Canada, 1970) (F)

This important ideological comment on the radical American youth culture embodies its values even in structure and style. A most creatively edited montage of the "struggle between life and death culture in America", it mingles Allen Ginsberg, Buckminster Fuller, Abbie Hoffman, and John Lennon with newsreels, subliminal effects, doctored TV images, the A-bomb, the Chicago Trial, the matrix of the new generation's sensibility -- to create a "psychedelic" equation of fact and metaphysics, itself an expression of Consciousness III and the new political poetry.



HARRY MUNTER

(Kjell Grede, Sweden, 1969)

A powerful, poetic image: the mystery of black against white, of an outsider walking on the water, on stilts, Christ-like, stubborn, the tension of his forward-leaning body reflecting his determination. This, indeed, is the topic of this intenselymysterious, lyrical film, one of the most original and disregarded works of contemporary cinema.

CO-CO PUFFS

(Ira Wohl, USA, 1972)

The unlikely -- and alien -- subject of a detailed drum lesson becomes a celebration of counterculture values as (without being subjected to "explanations" or "editorializing"), we discover the painful process of learning, the inevitable failures,

the ultimate triumph and the power relation between teacher and taught. An original and consciousness changing message from a world so odd we never knew we could learn to care about it.

FAMILY

(Hubert Smith, USA, 1971)

Made for the National Institute of Mental Health as a view of the patterns and interaction of a middle-class family, this beautiful cinema verite study, in its concentration on a particular lifestyle and emphasis on non-verbal, unconscious behavior, provides far more: a view of a relaxed, democratic family in action, in which neither side claims perfection, and all perform as friends in an eternal circle of warmth and love. The non-authoritarian attitudes, the spontaneous and repeated touching and hugging, the absence of competitiveness and strife are gentle indications of the new sensibility. Significant moments of unconscious bodily contact are slowed down and then frozen in brilliant visual comment.

THE FLOWERS OF ST. FRANCIS

(Roberto Rossellini, Italy, 1950) (F)

Early proponents of the counterculture: St. Francis and his followers return to nature, simplicity and povertyin Rossellini's neglected masterpiece of the humanist cinema which portrays subtle, haunting episodes in the life of a fervent and innocent seeker. Scenario by Rossellini and Fellini.

FATA MORGANA

(Werner Herzog, Germany, 1970) (F)

Films are now emerging from Germany that reveal, perhaps for the first time, the true state of mind of a country that has undergone fascism, total war, destruction, and killed its Jews; these films may be considered examples of a new, complex humanism tattooed -- for a change -- on the skins of shell-shocked, psychologically maimed Aryans. Such a film is *Fata Morgana* (cruelly disregarded by critics), which may some day be viewed as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* of the New German Cinema with its declaration of independence from the old, and shedding of both the commercial film and imitative avant-garde.

Fata Morgana is a sardonic, melancholic comment on man in the universe, its subtle and hallucinatory images accompanied by texts from sacred 16th century creation myths of Guatemalan Indians and the 1970 German avant-garde. It moves on a poetic, visual level, has no conventional plot, but cunningly employs the trappings of surface reality (sandscapes, barbed wire, industrial debris, natives that do not fit their environs) to probe depths beyond surrealism and metaphysics.

The land, though Africa, is a landscape of the mind, archetypal and eternal. The immense, inhuman grandeur of primeval dunescapes, waters, and horizons is caught in sensuous travelling shots revealing man's triumphant and empty rape of the land: flaming red girders of abandoned factories in the middle of deserts, their initial purpose unfathomable, masses of abandoned vehicles, steel pipes, barrels, military supplies, rotting symbioticallty with animal cadavers in intimate, frozen family tableaux that melt into the soil before our eyes; emaciated black children and strange old men in mysterious, poverty-stricken habitats -- all of this permeated by sand, nameless dread, flies, and an insufferable sun made visible in heatwave distortions which lend objects and "sets" a hallucinatory quality. "In Paradise," says the narrator, "man is born dead"; and Herzog refers to Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights": his paradise, too, contained God's fatal errors from the start (visible only in corners "so that the painter would not be branded as heretic").

Among Herzog's ideological weapons are absurd, bizarre tableaux: a determined young German woman, senselessly making black children repeat "Blitzkrieg is madness" in German (all of them knee-deep in water); a ridiculous frogman with fins and snorkel, holding on to a huge turtle while breathlessly informing us that it has flippers to move, a mouth to take nourishment, and "a behind where it comes out again"; a sweating, maniacal lizard-lover (obviously affected by years in the African sun), his square-jawed German visage distorted behind black glasses as he sadistically manipulates the animal, comments on its habits, and attempts to avoid its bites (flies hover over festering wounds on his hands,

inflicted earlier). The strongest sequence involves a catatonic drummer and a female pianist on a tiny stage in a brothel, who perform like robots, endlessly and off-key: "In the Golden Age, man and wife live in harmony", the commentator says, as they are photograph- ed head-on, with all the merciful cruelty of a humanist filmmaker who must show everything. At the end, they remain immobile and there is no applause.

Stylistically, the film consists of a series of extended travel shots moving along a horizontal axis, reminiscent in their ideological intensity of Godard's *Weekend* highway sequence; these are interrupted by stylized, frequently immobile set pieces, in which the always anonymous protagonists addressthe camera directly in medium shot or close-up.

The result is an interior travelogue, an obessive, hypnotic, and iconoclastic "comment" on technology, sentimentality, and stupidity, filled with everyday objects that reveal their frightening secrets; images, camera movements, and montage hewn as if from stone; a poetic, epic mood, perversely corrupted (and hence, elevated) by a sardonic, suffering magician, tremblingly aware of our limited possibilities, outrageous perseverance and almost lovable ridiculousness.

With this film, Herzog fulfils the promise of genius implicit in his earlier *Signs of Life* and *Even Dwarfs Started Small*, progressing to a level of artistry at once more subversive and more inaccessible; for here, working solely with the materials of reality, the filmmaker in a cosmic pun on cinema verite recovers the metaphysical beneath the visible. It is only in such works that we achieve intimations of the radical new humanism of the future. SC

FREE RADICALS

(Len Lye, USA, 1957?)

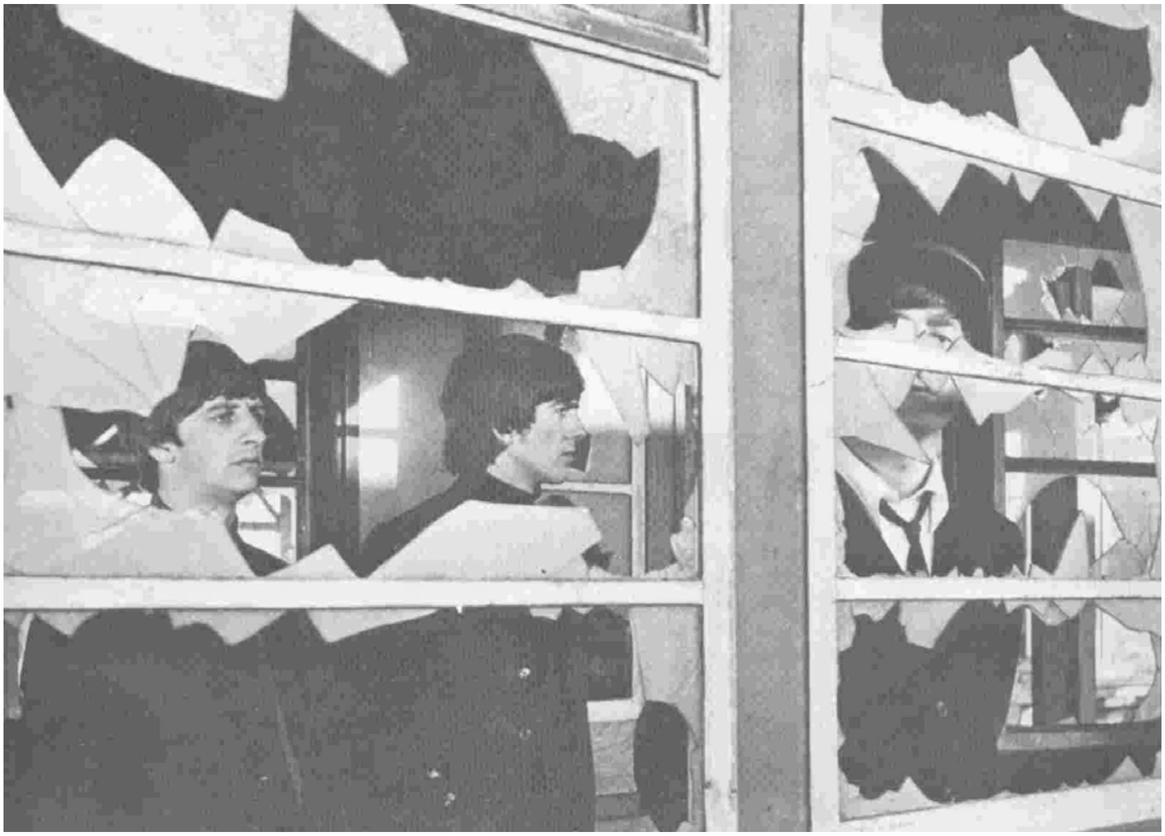
"A Free Radical is a fundamental particle of matter which contains the energy of all chemical change, very much like a compressed spring before release. The film gives an artistically symbolic portrayal of fundamental energy." With beautiful, exemplary economy, this long-neglected masterpiece of animation creates a perfectly controlled abstraction that foreshadowed the contemporary "cosmic" view in its fusion of science and mystery. The nervous, vibrating, non-objective designs, under constant, agitated tension, were directly engraved on blank film -- black leader, without the intervention of a camera.

GLEN AND RANDA

(Jim McBride, USA, 1971) (F)

Unaccountably disregarded by critics, this is a poisoned idyll of two young people in an America destroyed by

atomic war: turnpikes overgrown by weeds, nomads living off the debris, travelling con-men ironically hawking fragments of a lost civilization, and the unbearable search for a new beginning. Particularly moving is a silent, real-time sequence in which an old man and a youth stare out at an ocean sunset, looking for a non-existent answer. A paraphrase of the counterculture's sensibilities, the film's subversive potential lies in its straightforward acceptance and naturalistic portrayal of the destructibility of eternal American symbols; a destroyed Howard Johnson's restaurant is more difficult to take than newspaper articles warning about the dangers of atomic war. SC



A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

(Richard Lester, Great Britain, 1964) (F)

The jagged patterns of broken glass dominate three of the Beatles in their first film. In a prophetic image of things to come, Paul is absent. But even if the group itself no longer exists, its legacy continues in the values of the counterculture and within every member of the new generation; for these subversives pointed in the direction of the future; only very few can make this claim.

The playful anarchism and exuberant vitality of this work -- a thumbing of noses at the "straight" adult world -- caught the essence of the Beatle mystique

and even reinforced their electrifying presence with machine-gun editing, jump cuts, accelerated speed, quick movements in close-up, and a camera that never stood still. The best sequence is of their largely improvised, anarchic outdoor "dance" shot from a helicopter and closely cut to their famous "Can't Buy Me Love". The constant dissolution and reformation of their group patterns, seen in fluid motion against the geometric lines of a playing field is delightfully choreographic and lyrical. The Beatles' ideological refusal to take the world or themselves seriously, their almost surreal approach to their environment proved a perfect foil for Lester, previously responsible for the surrealist *Running, Jumping And Standing Still Film* (with Peter Sellers).

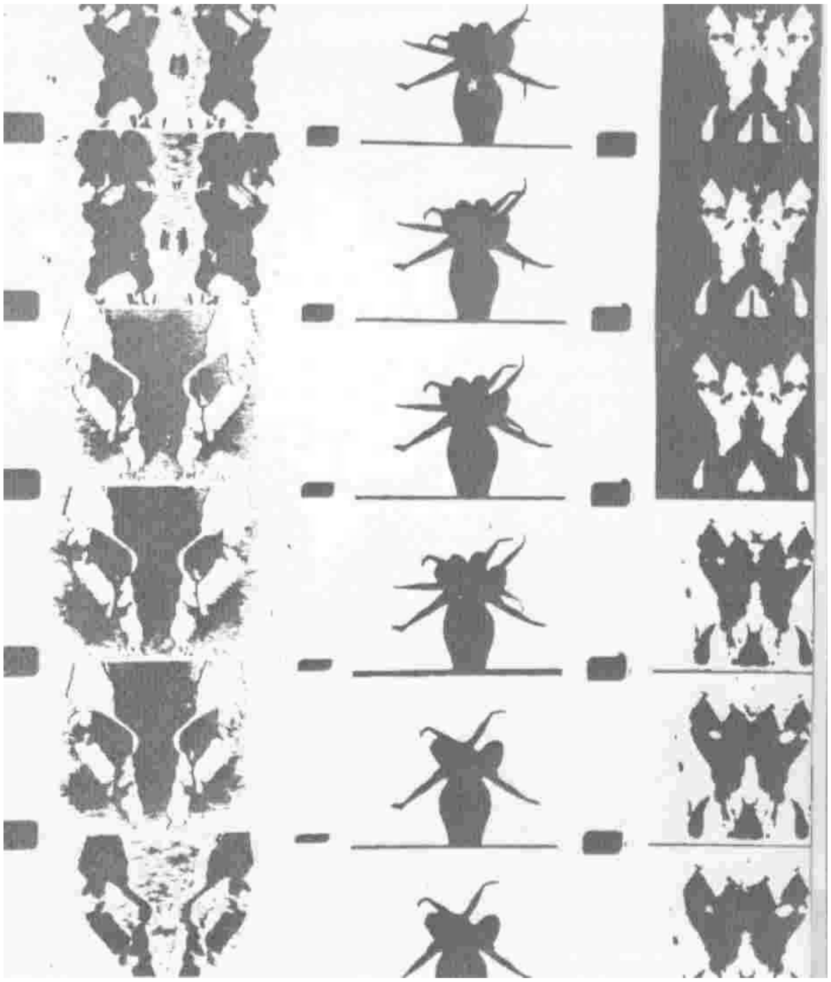
LAPIS

(James Whitney, USA, 1963-67)

Whether working together with his brother John, or singly, as here, James Whitney is one of the foremost pioneers of abstract cinema. Since the 60s, his work has turned increasingly complex, computer-oriented and religious in the cosmic sense. *Lapis* is hypnotic, centering around a mandala pattern and Indian music, and proceeding through ascending stages of wordless visual contemplation.

Though the image is non-objective -- or perhaps because -- the viewer, caught in its ever more consistent rhythms, loses himself in order to find his truer self. The orchestrations of ever-changing dots round a transforming, fiery core, coupled with the monotonously beautiful music, becomehallucinatory.

"The only subversive aspect of my film is the unrecognized, but mighty taboo; our tacit conspiracy to ignore who, or what we really are, Tat-Swam-Asi (That Art Thou), the startling and psychologically "subversive" way of realizing that theself is in fact the root and ground of the universe -- a realization so strange and inadmissible to the West that it isvirtually our most rigid taboo." (James Whitney)



OFF-ON

(Scott Bartlett, USA, 1967)

One of the most important attempts so far to express the new sensibility directly and poetically, in a perfect, magical fusion of non-verbal communication and advanced technological filmmaking (video-manipulation, multiple exposures and printing, solarization, and synthetic color). Indeterminacy, the union of opposites, the cosmic, the expansion of consciousness, the going beyond rationalism; all these are intimated purely visually, almost subliminally -- to those willing to "see".

LIGHTNING WATERFALL FERN SOUP

(Shelby Kennedy, USA, 1971)

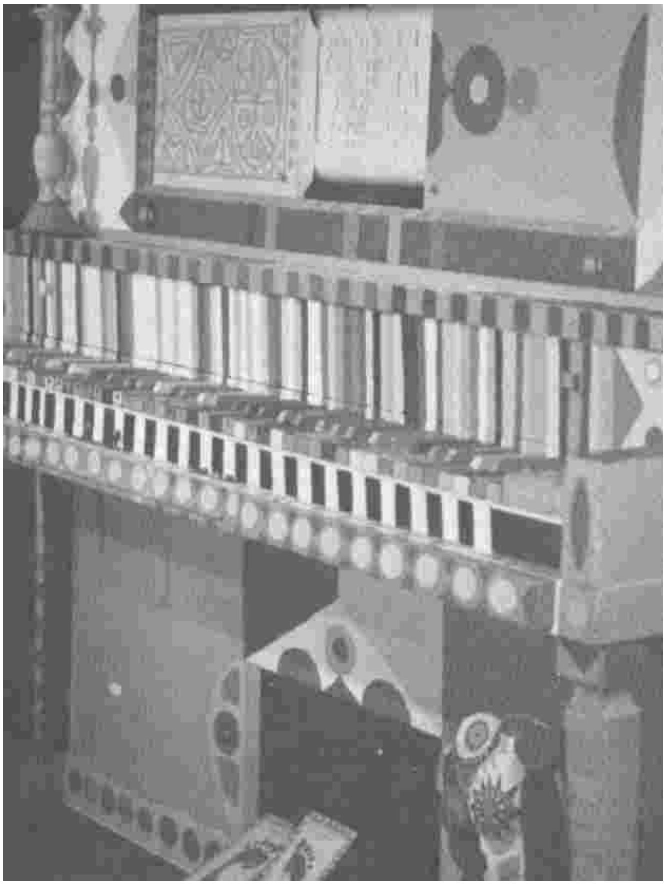
Amidst flashes of lightning, fern is gathered, sliced, mixed with water, and cooked; after this poetic, religious, act, it is eaten with reverence in a simple, romantic statement of Third Consciousness sensibility.

PARADISE NOW

(Sheldon Rachlin, Great Britain, 1970)

At least forty films have been made about the Living Theatre;

it remained to the American underground filmmaker Sheldon Rachlin (previously responsible for the marvelous *Vali*) to make the "definitive" film about one of the most famous of their works, *Paradise Now*, shot in Brussels and at the Berlin Sportpalast. Made on videotape, with expressionist coloring "injected" by electronic means, this emerges as a hypnotic transmutation of a theatrical event into poetic cinema, capturing the ambience and frenzy of the original. No documentary record could have done it justice. **SC**



PIANISSIMO

(Carmen D'Avino, USA, 1963)

An outstanding precursor of the new sensibility uses single frame animation to hand-paint (image by image!) an entire piano in an exuberant, maniacal explosion of color (and strong filmic rhythm). As he does this, the invisible artist creates his own version of reality: non-competitive, life-affirming, peaceful, filled with warmth and love of beauty.

NEBULA II

(Robert Frerck, USA, 1971)

After Jordan Belson, one might have thought no further mandala films could fruitfully be made; *Nebula II* quickly dispels this notion. As the ever-changing circular patterns become more complex and change in increasingly

rapid fashion, the incessant bombardment of our senses with flicker effects, visual transmogrifications, pulsating color, and enforced forward movement via zoom, finally sets up a sensory overload both hypnotic and overpowering in its beauty and mystical revelation.

SAMADHI

(Jordan Belson, USA, 1968)

Belson is the filmmaker who has most rigorously developed the forms and shapes of cosmic cinema -- non-objective patterns that yet remond one of microcosm and macrocosm, finding their ever-changing centers in works of constant flux, devoid of boundaries. The intention is to relate man to the universe or rather to reaffirm their indivisibility. Here he comes closest to recreating, in spectacularly beautiful images, the awe and splendor of the cosmos. Samadhi in Sanskrit stands for "that state of consciousness in which the individual soul merges with the universal soul." This ultimate condition of consciousness is therefore non-sensorial; the film concerns approaches to it.

PULL MY DAISY

(Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, USA, 1959)

Even the pose -- open, casual, mask-less -- reflects the new style. The poets Peter Orlovsky, Gregory Corso, and (sideways) Allen Ginsberg in a significant pioneering

film of the (then emerging) counterculture which complied with James Agee's request for "works of pure fiction, played against, into, and in collaboration with unrehearsed reality". Jack Kerouac's spontaneous narration helped evoke an image of a heroic, bedraggled, and prophetic circle that changed the consciousness of America's youth. **SC**

THIS IS IT

(James Broughton, USA, 1971)

A little nude boy in the woods -- exploring, playing with a ball -- and a Zen-like poem, its individual segments repeated several times, with long pauses between them. "This is it ... This is really it ... This is all there is ... And It's perfect as It is." The simplicity of the central idea increases its effectiveness, but because of the specificity of its realistic imagery and of the poem, it raises, more than the consciousness-lowering, hypnotic abstractions by Belson or James Whitney, the basic question about the resurgence of Indian philosophies in the Western counterculture: is the problem of poverty and oppression resolvable by cosmic acceptance? Is it the task of the privileged West to encourage others to accept conditions that ought to be changed?

SELF-OBLITERATION

(Jud Yalkut, USA, 1967)

In a strange film, the painter Kusima paints dots on bodies, flowers, grass, and even water in a suddenly significant attempt at expressing pantheism and ego transcendence by purely visual means.

A strangely compelling study of Yayoi Kusama, painter, sculptor and environmentalist, who paints polka dots on flowers, bodies, water, and grass in a thought-provoking attempt at pantheism and ego transcendence, culminating in relazed nude body painting and group sex.

LION'S LOVE

(Agnes Varda, USA, 1969)

An oddly affecting anarchic view of aspects of a new American sensibility by a noted French film director (the only dressed figure in the still). A collage of aspiring actors awaiting their opportunity in Hollywood, it stars Viva and the two creators of "Hair" in a casual menage a trois -- in which sex and nudity are neither "issues" nor proselytizing slogans. SC

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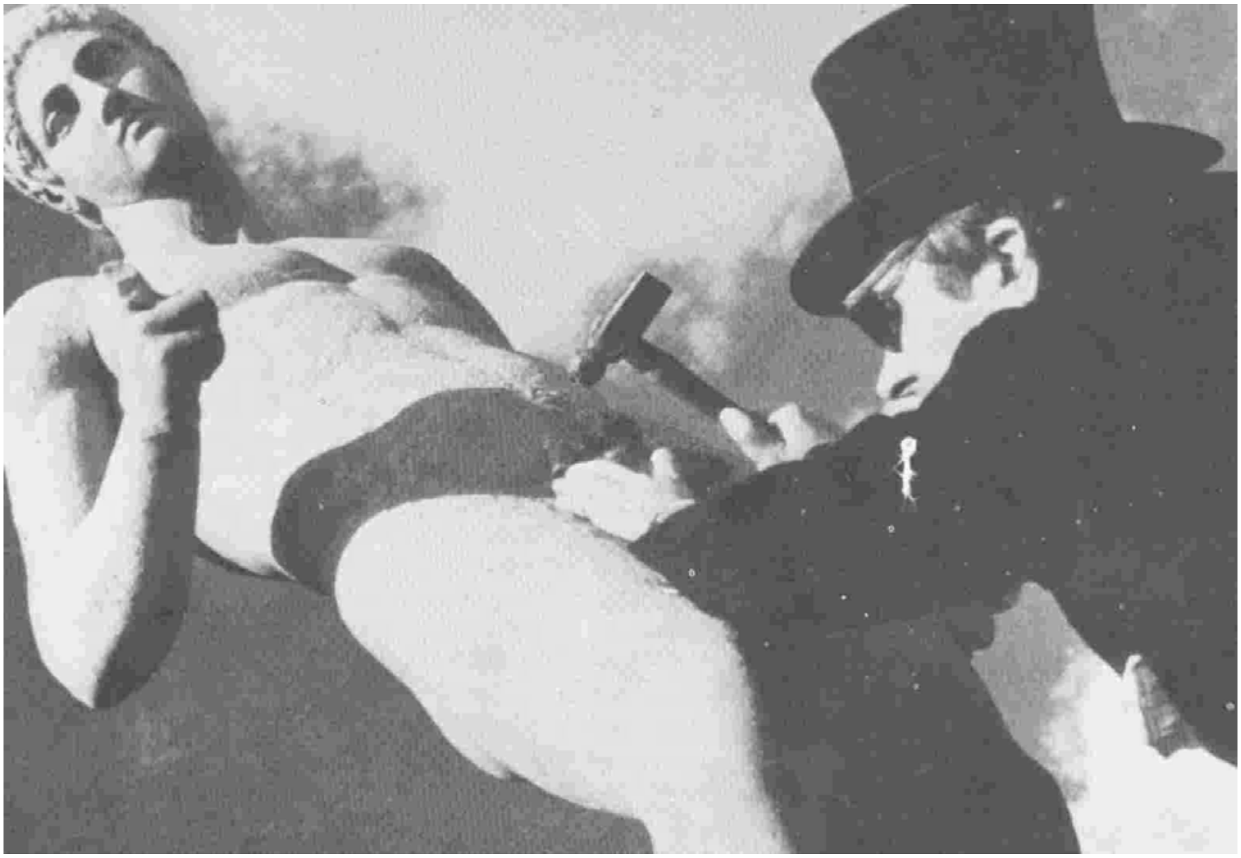

THE PLEASURE GARDEN

(James Broughton, Great Britain, 1953)

The censor at work, forever attempting to fix the unfixable. His task is unenviable, messy, bottomless, and secretly exciting. Broughton's comic, yet ideological fantasy celebrates the victory of sensual pleasure and love over prudery and authoritarianism; but the clumsy "hammer" (here even held wrongly) is nowadays being wielded more insidiously by ever more repressive forces in society and the outcome is not necessarily pre-ordained.

THE SUBVERSION OF SUBVERSION

It is in the nature of subversion that its perpetrators should be subverted in turn. For, in the wider sense, any subversion is but a reflection of a material conflict within society, in which opposing sides use both offensive and defensive devices to protect themselves. The subversive artist, moreover, is always on the outside. If the definition of subversion is the attempt to undermine existing institutions or value systems, the operative word is "existing"; the subversive attacks something "in control" and wishes to replace it by what does not yet exist and has as yet no power. With the growth of the technological state, society's methods for protecting itself against disruption and "anarchy" have become increasingly effective. The means of production, communication, and distribution are firmly in the state's hands and without them, the opposition cannot reach the masses with its subversive message. This is a particularly serious problem for film, a technological art requiring costly, complex tools and special facilities for exhibition.

The large number of films in this book may easily lead one to the conclusion that the subversive film is well and thriving. Nothing could be further from the truth. The majority of these films will be seen by only small numbers of people; their effectiveness is thus extremely limited. Within the system under attack, the extent of distribution of a subversive film stands in inverse relation to the extent of its subversion. The anti-American *Hour of the Blast Furnaces* -- though a masterpiece of political cinema, or rather because of this -- will not be given wide national distribution in America. The exhibition of an anti-Vietnam war film to peace groups may evoke applause or tears among these already converted groups, but how is one to reach the others? In America, a few political distributors (such as Newsreel, American Documentary Films, and Tricontinental FilmCenter) have come into existence and attempt to reach larger and unaffiliated audiences, but their resources are limited and neither governmental art bodies nor private foundations (themselves part of the power structure) subsidize their activities. It is precisely because the American Establishment knows that these groups are of no real danger to it that allows their existence; in so far as they might become more dangerous, they are "contained" by "democratic" devices too numerous to mention in detail such as tax harrassment, fire laws, and legal interference.

Significantly, the United States, though moving in the direction of a more authoritarian state, still has the most developed national network for the non-theatrical exhibition of films, including practically all those discussed here, at film societies, universities, public libraries, churches, and civic or political organizations, operating with 16mm equipment of often surprisingly professional quality. Prints can also be bought or leased; this enables public libraries and colleges to own their own collections. More than a thousand lend films free, as they do books, upon presentation of a library card; those in larger cities often own some of the "subversive" titles, to the discomfort of local conservatives. Political censorship is legally non-existent, though sometimes attempted against particularly radical films. Previously, such action was more readily taken against sex films, and despite the changed attitude of the last few years, it is safe to assume, however, that Muehl's *Sodoma* could not be shown in much of

America, and that the overall situation will considerably worsen as a result of the pro-censorship 1973 Nixon Supreme Court decision. In any case, although the non-theatrical distribution and exhibition network propably reaches a potential audience of several millions, this still represents only a fraction of the total American audience. Nevertheless, given its composition -- students and organized groups -- the political and cultural influence of this audience exceeds its actual size.

The American situation is not reproduced elsewhere, though Western Europe, Scandinavia and Canada possess growing non-theatrical markets. In the Eastern countries, no individually initiated showings or programming can take place and the importation of films is strictly limited and centralized at the top. A few foreign political films will be bought each year, provided they subvert the West rather than the East. It is therefore clear that the majority of the films in this book are not readily availablefor exhibition in most countries (except for the commercial films mentioned, from Fellini to Kubrick to sex films, where they are permitted.)

As for the international circulation of subversive films, commercial distributors do not generally buy such films of other nations and non-commercial distribtors cannot afford to do so. Many governments control the export of films, thereby preventing international circulation of unpleasant works. The majority of subversive films are in 16mm which cannot properly (or at all) be shown in many countries. However, several national television networks now buy independent "subversive" films of other nations; in this way, certain important American underground and political films have been more widely seen in West Germany than in the USA.

The extent to which art affects society needs to be further investigated. The surrealists did not, as had been their intention, succeed in transforming capitalism. It was only when they began to intervene as citizens (politically) and not merely as artists (aesthetically) that some were able to help bring change. Bunuel bitterly complained that *Un Chien Andalou* had been misunderstood as a dream instead of a murderous attack. Eisenstein's films were not popular with the Russian masses. By definition, subversive filsm of quality do best at congregations of the faithful or at international film festivals, as the assembled filmmakers and critics are largely disaffiliated oppositionists themselves (in spirit, not always in body).

The new sexual revolution has not yet transformed relations between the sexes and is, in fact, at times attacked by the new feminists as male-oriented. Hardcore sex has created new millionaires and driven art films from many cinemas (though permitted lonely men to improve their masturbational fantasies and couples their sexual performance) but it has not yet changed a sexually repressive civilization. The rapid liberalization of sexual mores in an otherwise not noticeably freer society may indeed be partially suspect; much evidence points to an increase in mechanical sexuality at the expense of eroticism, growing commercialization of sex in the guise of sexual freedom, and the availability of instant,

guiltless sex to help ensure the smooth functioning of society. Significantly, American films have simultaneously grown increasingly apolitical and less concerned with moral issues.

There is, in fact, every reason to agree with Marcuse's pessimistic confirmations of present-day capitalism's ability to absorb, pervert and subsume opposition; and to transform the oppositional product itself (be it politics or sex) into a commodity. If it is not too radical, it can even be publicized, thereby robbing it of its cult appeal while simultaneously neutralizing it ideologically by apparent acceptance. In this sense, the latitude granted to independent showcase to exhiibit whatever they wish, implies that they serve as a safety valve for the draining off of radical impulses.

The production of subversive films remains as uncertain and precarious as ever. In the East, the Russians have proved how, once opposition reaches a certain degree of danger as in Czechoslavakia, it is possible to snuff out, literally overnight, an entire film movement of international importance; these directors now do manual work, or are employed in areas not connected with the cinema, or drink themselves to death (this exactly describes the situation of the most talented and promising filmmakers of China in the courseof the Cultural Revolution). Other oppositional directors of the East (Polanski, Skolimowski *et al*) have gone to the West, meeting defeat or integration into the commercial industry. (Borowczyk, Lenica, and Kristl are exceptions, partly because their work is not sufficiently enticing to commercial interests.) In the West, significant numbers of new independents constantly arise, make a few films, meet with limited or no distribution, and then graduate into the industry or disappear. The larger figures have their own problems; Bertolucci seems to be on the way towards becoming the bourgeoisie's darling, Godard stubbornly flounders in isolation and ineffectuality, and the Czechs Forman, Kadar and Passer, Glauber Rocha, and others are men without a country.

After *I Am Curious Yellow, Last Tango in Paris, A Clockwork Orange*, or *Straw Dogs*, it is becoming increasingly difficult to shock the bourgeoisie, who now accept all insults with a benign smile, secure in the knowledge that their pockets are not being picked simultaneously. When danger of this does arise, the smile disappears and power reasserts itself, for instance, by wiping out the leading cadre of the Black Panther party in intricate ways, driving underground the radical left, or encouraging it by means of *agent provocateurs* to blow itself up. Somewhere between the smile and its absence, a brief attempt is made (not always unsuccessful) to buy off the oppositionist by four-color covers in national magazines or by extensive TV exposure at peak hours (by which, between six commercials, he believes himself to be advancing the cause of revolution).

Nor should we forget those discredited minions of law and order, the

censors, another cog in the generalized web of gentle suppression. Since it is their duty to conserve and that of the artist to "go beyond", they are forever at odds with him and, more importantly, forever lagging behind him. They are always shocked anew by yet further descents into unspeakable immorality and political unorthodoxy, disregarding the historical fact that yesterday's outrage is today's truth (or cliche) and that the elimination of taboos is the order of the day in all fields of human endeavor.

As for the censoring of the presumably subversive, it is universal and seems to operate equally perniciously under all systems. There are Russian films by young filmmakers that no one outside (or even inside) Russia has ever seen; the Russians tried for years to prevent *Andrei Roublev* from being shown abroad. Americans may not see films from Cuba; Eastern Europeans are prevented from viewing Western political films, unless critical of the West; Arabs may not see Israeli films and Israelis, until a few years ago, could not see German ones; France did not permit *The Battle of Algiers* to be shown and then prohibited the left-wing 1968 "cine-tracts". American experimental films sent to festivals abroad have been confiscated upon return, as the repressive American customs law has no objection to their export but will not allow their re-entry (presumably with the piquant theory that it is legitimate for Americans to corrupt foreigners but not themselves). Swedes can see sex films, but not films of violence. Americans, until 1974, could view pornographic films in regular theatres provided they were American-made; European pornographic films -- or even films featuring only frontal nudity -- cannot be imported. Brazil banned *Prato Palomares*, France banned *Do Not Deliver Us From Evil*, Yugoslavia banned *WR - Mysteries of the Organism*, the Czech pre-Dubcek government attempted, in vain, to "recall" *Jan Palach* (film record of the young Czech martyr's funeral) from abroad. Every country has its own favorite subversive, without whose suppression it presumably could not continue to exist. Further, apart from direct political suppression of films, there exists an even more efficient system of "censorship" prior to production; this consists of the mere withholding of private financing in the West, or of state financing in the East.

It is therefore important not to confuse the quality of particular subversive films with their effectiveness. Many of the most important films in this book -- *The Blood of the Beasts, Hour of the Blast Furnaces, Fata Morgana, Kirsa Nicholina, Red Squad, Andrei Roublev, Our Lady of the Turks, La Revelateur, Viva La Muerte* -- even more widely seen works such as *WR - Mysteries of the Organism* or *Weekend* -- have had only very limited distribution.

Subversive cinema, in precise delineation of its precarious, largely powerless

role *vis-a-vis* the state, is left with a host of unanswered questions, ranging from the paradoxical to the unpleasant. It appears that the less subversive a film, the wider its potential audience; and the more conventional in form, the more people it might hope to attract, but the fewer will be affected. It appears that it is possible for Kubrick to tone down *A Clockwork Orange* after its release to obtain a (literally) more profitable "rating", and that the sodomy scene can be cut from *Last Tango in Paris* to allow the film's presentation in England; if such climactic scenes are not considered important enough to keep in, why were they put into the films to begin with? It also appears that Bunuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* is distributed by Twentieth Century Fox; is the company unaware of its seditious implications or are these too weak to matter? The makers of *Red Square* were molested by police and FBI during and after its production; but they are "at liberty" (their names securely listed in some master file) and continue as before -- as does the Red Squad. Certain oppositional films from the East were "allowed" *pro forma* one-week runs in one or a few theatres in the countries involved, permitting them to announce their democratic liberalism while keeping the fabric of suppression firmly intact. The directors of the subversive cinema are often serious theoreticians and fire fellow intellectuals and critics with their fervor. BUT THE REAL QUESTION REMAINS: HOW TO REACH THE MASSES "OUT THERE" WITH FIVE HEAVY CANS OF 35mm FILM AND NOWHERE TO SHOW THEM? This is the meaning of the tragic quest of Godard, the reason why respect must be paid to the man even if one lacks confidence in his direction.

In the last analysis, however, subversive cinema has on its side two factors of such fundamental significance that they justify both its role and the writing of this book; the inevitable creation of new injustices and horror by the existing power systems (cumulative, in the age of technology and atomic power) and the concomitant rise of ever new cadres of rebels in every generation -- another way of saying that subversive cinema could not exist without its enemies. Any pessimism regarding the failure of one talent or the co-option of another is outweighed by the spectacular flow of new generational talent and fresh, hot anger. With confidence in the inevitable crimes of one side and the inevitable reaction of the other, one can therefore look forward to future contests, their outcome by no means predetermined, since problems that seem insurmountable today will yield to the more complex intelligence of children still playing ball in the parks of the world.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

(Stanley Kubrick, Great Britain, 1968) (F)

Cult film of the young, this is a manifesto of the new sensibility; a nostalgic elegy to innocence lost to technology, a vision of truths beyond understanding. It ends with unforgettable images of the new star child in space, facing the earth he must transform to make it human again. SC

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FILM AS A SUBVERSIVE ART: MAIN INDEX

SUBTERRANEAN CINEMA

FILM
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THE FILMMAKER AS SUBVERSIVE: ONE
THE POLITICAL
Claude Lelouch, Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Louis Malle (standing), Roman Polanski, demanding the closure of the Cannes Film Festival during the 1968 events.

THE ETERNAL SUBVERSION

In the last analysis, every work of art, to the extent that it is original and breaks with the past instead of repeating it, is subversive. By using new form and content, it opposes the old, if only by implication, serves as an eternally dynamic force for change, and is in a permanent state of "becoming". It is therefore the triumph, the irony and the inevitable fate of

the subversive creator, as he succeeds, immediately to supersede himself; for at the moment of victory, he is already dated.

Art can never take the place of social action, and its effectiveness may indeed be seriously impaired by restrictions imposed by the power structure, but its task remains forever the same: to change consciousness. When this occurs, it is so momentous an achievement, even with a single human being, that it provides both justification and explanation of subversive art.

The subversive artist performs as a social being. For if it is true that developments in philosophy, politics, physics, and cosmology have affected the evolution of modern art, and if the subversion of the contemporary filmmaker is thus fed by art itself, it is also directly related to society as a whole. Here the artist finds himself at odds with its unplanned and cancerous growth in the service of the profit motive and its heedless disregard of human values. Wherever he turns, he sees exploitation and magnificent wealth, heart-rending poverty and colossal waste, the destruction of races and entire countries in the name of democracy or a new order, the denial of personal liberties on a global scale, the corruption of power and privilege, and the growing international trend toward totalitarianism. He sees control of all communication by the few and the rise of new media (television and cable TV) that hold the technological potential of more repression. He sees the blighted cities, the polluted rivers and oceans, the unbridled exploitation of natural resources, the succession of economic crises, inflation, depressions, and ever more destructive wars, and the rise -- as permanent and monstrous institutions -- of war economies and their intolerable burden upon society as a whole. He witnesses the phenomenon of manipulated democracy and an electorate whose voting power is increasingly denuded of meaning, since real control rests elsewhere.

All this explains why so many of the most serious international filmmakers find themselves in varying degrees of revolt or opposition to their respective establishments -- and also find an affinity to the emerging third world cinema and the new pro-democratic forces in the East. It is here that the Czechoslavak film renaissance of the Dubcek era assumes its profound international significance and acquires the historical weight that the Russians, despite their destruction of this movement, have not been able to eliminate. There have not yet been any oppositional films from Russia or China; perhaps they exist, though control over the means of film production makes this unlikely. One can only surmise that at some date Sinyavskys and Solzhenitsyns of cinema will arise in these countries, to join filmmakers all over the world, whose task, by definition, constitution, and by virtue of the repressive societies

within which they operate, must forever remain subversive.

Forever? Forever. For it is clear that even a post-revolutionary society, based on the ideas the subversives hold dear, will carry within itself new potentials of corruption, new bureaucracies, and new institutions which, at first progressive, will degenerate into ossified structures to be overcome in turn. It was Marx who, when asked in an interview to characterize the meaning of life in a single word, unhesitatingly replied: "Struggle". Was it a slip of the tongue that prevented him from limiting this definition to life "under capitalism", thus giving it the historical dimension he gave to every other phenomenon? Or was it not rather his realization, so often expressed in his philosophical writings, that the essence of life, under all circumstances and in all societies, was eternal change, the constant transformation of all forms and systems?

It is in this sense that the subject of this book will always remain on the agenda, and that these pages are but a rough draft; for the subject of this book is human freedom, and its guardians, at all time and under all conditions, are the subversives.

THE FILMMAKER AS SUBVERSIVE: TWO

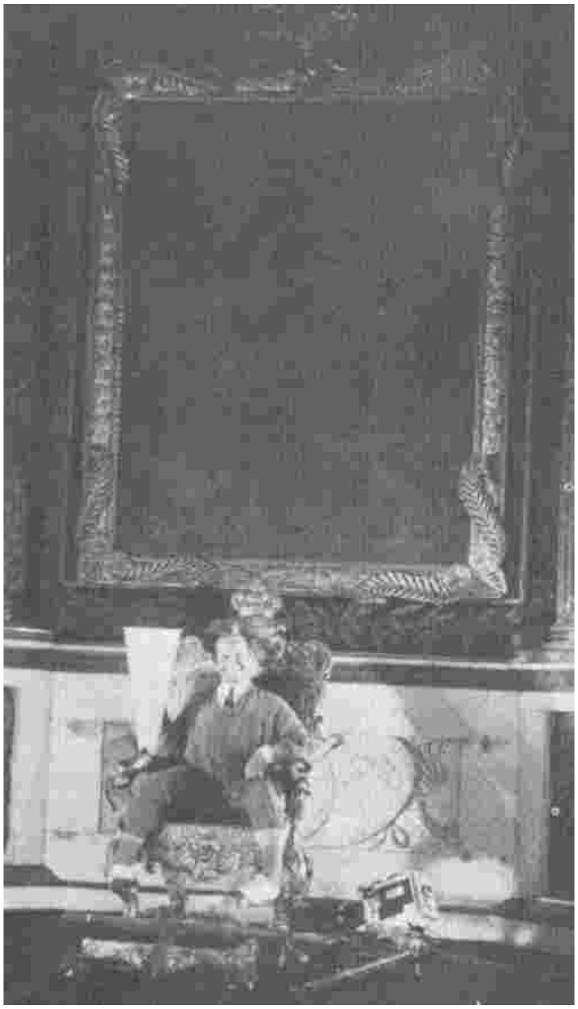
THE ANTI-CLERICAL

Bunuel during the shooting of *The Milky Way* --
and the cross he has to bear. He fights it,
but he cannot be separated from it.

THE FILMMAKER AS SUBVERSIVE: THREE

THE SEX-REFORMING COSMOLOGIST

James Broughton directing *The Golden Positions*,
forever non-conventional, forever willing to learn.



THE FILMMAKER AS SUBVERSIVE: FOUR

THE COMMUNIST

Eisenstein on location for *October*, lounging on the Tsar's throne. There is a touch of (however playful) monomania.

THE FILMMAKER AS SUBVERSIVE: FIVE

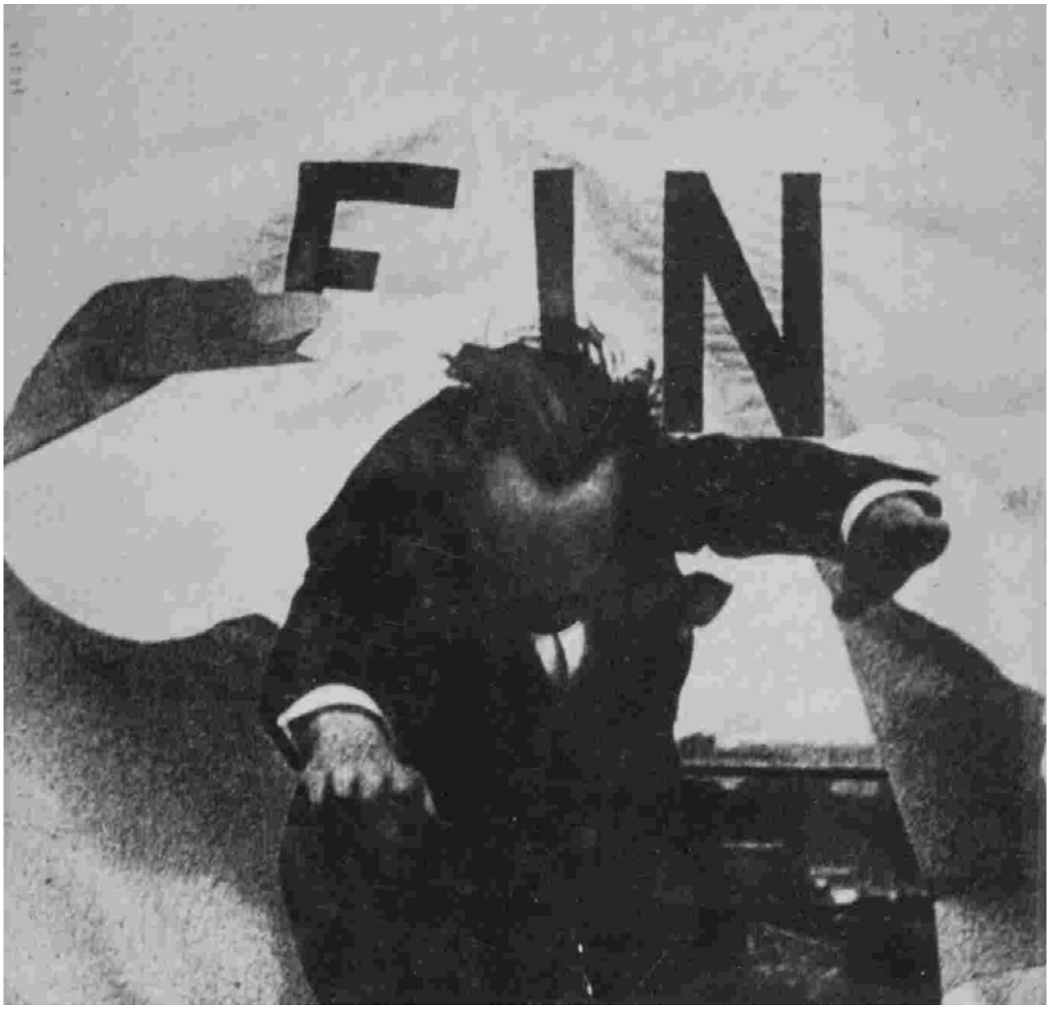
THE ANARCHIST

Otto Muehl and His Films. Portrait of the artist as liberated (yet sex-bound) man, eyes immodestly raise to the heavens.

RELATIVITY

(Ed Emshwiller, USA, 1966

Man neither dominates this composition nor is he necessarily dwarfed by it; he faces the sun squarely, questioningly, and with determination. He, the earth he stands on, the air he breathes, the vegetation surrounding him, are one. Significantly, Emshwiller's visual metaphors of man's place in the universe draw on both science and metaphysics.



ENTR'ACTE
(Rene Clair, France, 1924)
"The End" -- but not the end. The daring destruction of the otherwise inviolable end-title subversively disrupts the illusion of cinema and visually reaffirms the openness of experience.

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